

**"SHALL THE SISTERS SPEAK?":
RECOVERING WOMEN'S STORY AS EMPOWERMENT FOR LEADERSHIP
IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)**

**A Professional Project
Presented to
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of the Requirements for the Degree
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**by
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Abstract

"Shall the Sisters Speak?":

Recovering Women's Story As Empowerment for Leadership In the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

This project addresses the need to recover and tell the stories of women leaders in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). A basic assumption is that the story of women in leadership in the larger history of the Disciples of Christ denomination is an important resource for empowering women today for leadership and for renewing the possibility that the church can be a beneficiary of women's gifts and talents. Another underlying assumption is that the story of women in the Disciples of Christ has not received adequate attention in the general historical works of the movement. The stories of women have not been told and their influence and contributions to the Disciples of Christ movement have not been incorporated into the history and into the growing identity of the denomination.

The methodology of this project includes historical research to identify and tell the stories of women and theological reflection to establish the power of story.

The historical research presented in Chapter 2, will examine the story of women as it developed in the midst of controversy over what roles nineteenth century women could assume in the church's ministry. The controversy will be illustrated by articles and letters appearing in Disciples periodicals in the nineteenth century.

In Chapter 3, resources found in general and states histories of the Disciples of Christ, in histories of women's work, and in the statistical data

presented in the annual Year Book reports will offer stories of women's leadership. Women's contributions will be viewed in time periods defined by significant historical events related to women's leadership.

Chapter 4 examines the power of story as supported by scholarship in the theology of story. This chapter includes an examination of theologians of story, a proposed model for viewing the manner in which story empowers, and an analysis of women's stories as a resource for supporting the leadership of women and for challenging the church to reexamine women's contributions in the past in order to benefit from women's gifts in the present and the future.

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CHAPTER 1

"Shall the Sisters Speak?": An Introduction

The need to recover and tell women's stories of leadership in the history of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is the beginning point for this project. These stories are an important resource for empowering women in the present to assume leadership roles which will more fully utilize their gifts. Empowered and gifted women leaders can renew and revitalize the church's ministry and vision.

Women's stories are not readily available to those without access to theological libraries and archives containing the primary and secondary resources which provide the information. The stories of women's leadership in the Christian Church lie like veins of ore scattered throughout a mountain. Along with access to the mines, persons also need tools and time to discover the resources for the stories they yield.

When one searches for references to women's contributions and leadership in the history of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the card catalogues and indices present a discouraging picture. Based on the references to women in the general histories of the Disciples of Christ one might conclude that women's leadership was an important, but not major influence in shaping the church's history. Disciples historians give brief mention to women's story, primarily focusing on women's leadership in the more traditional and acceptable roles of missions, benevolence, and women's work.

General histories of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), particularly those authored by Moore, Garrison and DeGroot, and McAllister

and Tucker, yield limited source material on women's leadership and contributions to the movement.¹ Each of these general histories mentions the significant work of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions as well as a few names and stories of women who engaged in leadership in the movement's history. These mentions of women are presented more as adornment on the broader story of the movement than as an important and integral part of the movement's growth and development. Of these three general histories, only McAllister and Tucker mention Clara Celestea Hale Babcock by name, and note the extraordinary and significant fact that Disciples began ordaining women as early as 1888; being one of the earliest Protestant bodies in the United States to do so.² These historians of the movement have failed to tell the story of women in leadership and to treat it with the serious attention it deserves in the context of the larger story of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

My interest in the story of women in leadership in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) began in a Disciples history class. I elected to write about women, being ignorant of that story. As a woman entering the ordained ministry and expecting to offer my gifts for leadership in the church, I felt a deep personal interest in and a need to know the stories of women who had gone before. Having heard that Disciples had "always"

¹These general histories are listed chronologically: W.T. Moore, A Comprehensive History of the Disciples of Christ (New York: Revell, 1909); Winifred E. Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1948); and Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker, Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (St. Louis: Bethany, 1975). These general historical works on Disciples of Christ are an important resource for this project in identifying the absence of the story of women.

² McAllister and Tucker, 263.

ordained women, I began researching the historical material for references to women.

In the general histories I found little information about women. I learned from McAllister and Tucker that:

In the 1890's railroads began to offer reduced fares for ordained persons serving mission boards and the church. Disciples women were eager to use every opportunity to economize for the furtherance of their missionary program. Despite earlier conservatism regarding women in positions of leadership, at sometime in this period the first woman Disciple was ordained. She was Clara Celestea Hale Babcock. Soon women were ordained in several regions, usually in order to take advantage of the railroad's generosity. Ordination of women as a theological issue was never discussed. By the first decade of the twentieth century a number of Disciples women had been ordained to Christian ministry and service.³

Beyond these general histories, the search for women's story yielded a significant body of resources found in Disciples periodicals, state histories and biographical material that perhaps was overlooked and, if not, certainly was undervalued by Disciples historians. These primary and secondary resources indicated that the question of women's leadership roles in Disciples history has been debated vigorously since the beginning of the movement. Historical resources also indicated that women had been exercising leadership in significant ways.

The above quote from McAllister and Tucker, regarding women in ministry and their ordination in the Disciples movement, implied that Babcock was perhaps a missionary taking advantage of the reduced railroad fares along with others. As indicated in Chapter 3, this was not the case. Babcock was a woman ordained by a local church, and her pastoral ministry

³ Ibid.

covered over thirty-five years. This example calls into question the authors' statement that women were ordained "usually to take advantage of the railroad's generosity."⁴ The historical evidence presented in this project does not dispute McAllister and Tucker's view that the ordination of women was not discussed by Disciples as a theological issue. However, the periodical resources do show that the discussion regarding women in formal leadership roles was a practical and Biblical issue capturing the attention of Disciples. This passing reference to Clara Babcock is one example of the inadequate attention given to the contributions and significance of women's leadership.

Disciples periodicals such as the Christian Standard, the Christian-Evangelist, and the Millennial Harbinger, are an important resource for telling the story of Disciples women in leadership in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Other important resources are state histories, histories which deal specifically with women's mission work, and biographical material. Finally, the annual Year Book reports of the denomination offer statistical references that document women who served as ministers in local churches as well as in state and national leadership positions. These resources, along with the general histories mentioned above, will provide the materials for recovering the stories of Disciples women in leadership.

Scholars have clearly done a better job of telling the stories of the "heroes" than the stories of the "heroines" in Disciples history. There is ample historical documentation regarding the "fathers" who lead the movement, shaped its theology and structure, and guided it to its present place in history. While acknowledging that this part of the Disciples story is important and necessary, there is a need to expand the historical account by

⁴ Ibid.

recovering and including the stories of the "mothers" of the movement who guided and shaped it with their gifts for leadership.

Lacking the knowledge of women's contributions to the movement is a problem for women of the present who need to hear their mothers' stories. The church also needs to hear these accounts. Women in the church are impoverished by the omission of their story in the church's history. Without these stories of women who have gone before, women must live with a limited story or turn to the stories of men and seek to translate male stories to find empowerment as female leaders. This task requires excessive energy and is not necessary because there is a significant collection of overlooked resources containing women's stories. The stories of male leaders are important for women and the church. Women did find empowerment in the rousing stories of the men in scripture, tradition, and their life experience, but this is not enough.

The paucity of women's stories creates a problem for the church, which lives out of an untruthful and inaccurate identity without its stories of women. When human lives and actions are based on a history dominated by the male perspective, persons live out of a partial story. A reality, based on a patriarchal model, that values men and devalues women, is created and perpetuated. In this model, persons live out of metaphors that are inadequate for women. These metaphors derive from a history that is at best untruthful, and at worst, denies men and women full partnership in ministry and denies women full participation in ministry and leadership in God's kingdom.

Without women's stories of the past, women today lack a powerful resource for naming their experience and identifying themselves as leaders in the church. Women have limited access to the stories by which they can

discover their gifts and test their leadership styles. Without their stories, women do not have this valuable and empowering resource. The absence of women's past contributions in the historical accounts creates the danger that women's leadership styles can become distorted and manipulative. These styles can be distorted when women base their leadership on male stories and models and can be manipulative when women separate themselves from the whole church and create "queendoms" that rely on separateness as a basis for power.

Before turning to the story of Disciples women in leadership, it is important to define more clearly the terminology that will be used throughout this project. The terms "Disciples movement", "Disciples", and "Disciples of Christ" will refer to the church known today as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). One of the legacies of the past is confusion about the name of this movement; the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has been called Christians, Disciples, Disciples of Christ, Christian Church, and Church of Christ. The movement has been identified as Campbellites, Stoneites, Reformers, the Campbell-Stone movement, the Restoration movement, and the "Brotherhood", among other things. This project will cover the history of the Disciples of Christ with attention to the period from 1832 to the present. This period begins in the year that the Christians, led by Barton Stone, and the Reformers or Disciples, led by Thomas and Alexander Campbell, formed one body and called themselves Disciples of Christ. The main branch of this movement, in distinction from the Churches of Christ and the independent and undenominational Christian Churches which broke away in this century to form separate bodies, will be the focus for the project.

A second term which will appear frequently is leadership. Leadership incorporates the activity and service of women in the ministry of the church beyond their roles as participants in worship and their influence in the home. This definition includes the activities of ordained and lay women involved in such leadership roles as preaching, teaching, mission work, organizing churches and voluntary societies for mission, public speaking, administration, as well as professional and elected leadership at the local, state, and national levels of church life. While affirming the significant contributions made by the informal leadership of women in their home spheres and behind the scenes in the life of the faith community, this project will focus more specifically on women's leadership in the public, formal, and denominational arenas.

Disciples women have a story. Looking to resources beyond the accounts of women told by the general histories will expand the story of women in leadership. An important part of this project is to tell the story of women in leadership as it is found in the periodicals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the state histories, and histories of women's work in missions. Chapter 2 will examine the stories of women in leadership that arose out of nineteenth century controversies as women and their male supporters challenged the limited opportunities for leadership and pushed beyond the narrow and confining roles of the day. In Chapter 3, the research will present the specific leadership roles that Disciples women created and assumed in the movement viewed in time frames defined by significant events for women in leadership. What is the importance of telling the story? What power is available in the resource of women's stories? These questions and others will be addressed in Chapter 4, which will explore the value of reclaiming and telling women's stories as an important

resource for naming and identifying women as leaders. From the standpoint of the theology of story, this chapter will point to ways in which women's story can challenge and transform individuals and the church.

The stories presented in this project will provide a helpful resource to affirm and invite women's leadership in the church today. Women's stories are an important resource for the whole Disciples church as it grows in its identity as a denomination and continues to participate significantly in the ecumenical movement. The research which undergirds the telling of the story is part of a larger movement to build the body of literature that recovers, tells, and analyzes the stories of women in leadership in the Christian communities. This project joins with other research papers, projects, and books that have been written about women of various denominations with a view to restoring the contributions of women to the Christian tradition.

CHAPTER 2

Controversies Concerning Women's Leadership: The Story Emerges

The question serving as title for this project, "Shall the Sisters Speak?" arose early in the American religious movement known today as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Answers to this question were the occasion for vigorous and sustained debate that engaged the serious attention of Disciples from all walks of life. Letters and articles in the movement's periodicals were written by men and women, old and young, scholars and laity, liberal and conservative. The question, first asked in 1840, captured the attention of Disciples for decades. What would they do with those women?

The question of women's leadership, and the ensuing debate and controversy, is the beginning place for the emerging story of Disciples women in leadership. One can find a rich body of material in the periodical resources of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which documents the controversy over what roles women could fill in the church and how they could appropriately serve God according to scripture and cultural practice.

Disciples historians Lester McAllister and William Tucker, authors of Journey in Faith, point out the power of the press in shaping the Disciples movement. They state:

To understand the development of Disciples from a small band of reformers in the early 1800s to a mainstream religious body, a century later, it is imperative to recognize the unusually

significant and sometimes decisive role of religious journalism in the life and thought of the movement.¹

Furthermore, noting the authority of editors in the developing movement, they quote one of the many Disciples cliches -- "Disciples did not have bishops, they had editors."²

From the considerable selection of periodicals which had a major part in shaping the movement, this project will utilize writings from the Christian Standard, the Christian-Evangelist, and the Millenial Harbinger to explore the question of women's leadership. The choice of these three periodicals, from the hundreds that were published by Disciples in the last century and a half, is based on their prominence in the movement, their wide readership, their longevity, and their availability. These particular periodicals are indexed, thus making the material regarding women and other topics more accessible to the researcher. The first editors of each of these resources were prominent male leaders and designers of the denomination in the first half of its history.

The Christian Standard began publication on April 7, 1866. Isaac Errett served as the first editor. McAllister and Tucker judge this periodical to be the most powerful weekly among the Disciples periodicals.³ In their opinion, the Standard sought to embody a "progressive spirit" and to challenge "inflexible primitivism."⁴

¹ McAllister and Tucker, 212.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 219.

⁴ Ibid.

The Christian-Evangelist had the longest publishing history of the Disciples periodicals.⁵ Beginning as the Gospel Echo in 1863, after adding several other periodicals and changing names, it finally was issued as the Christian-Evangelist in 1882. James H. Garrison was its most noted and prominent editor and was a kindred spirit to Isaac Errett.⁶ Considered second only to the Standard, the Christian-Evangelist finally surpassed the Standard as that periodical shifted its focus and audience to meet the needs of the "undenominational fellowship" (Christian Churches and Churches of Christ).⁷

The Millenial Harbinger was published from 1830-1870 with Alexander Campbell, one of the movement's founders, as its guiding force. After his death in 1866, the Millenial Harbinger's declining circulation forced its closure in 1870.⁸

A prolific people when it came to the press, "Disciples at any one time probably had as many editors per thousand members as any religious body in America."⁹ These periodicals are a vital resource for recovering the story of Disciples women. They yield, in the letters and articles about the "woman question," the bits of ore scattered through the mountain of material that tells women's story. The numerous writings document the importance of that question in the growing movement and give evidence of women's

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 214.

⁹ Ibid., 213.

leadership. Based on these periodical resources, Chapter 2 will examine the emerging story of women's leadership as it arose out of the controversies identified in the periodicals named above. This chapter will set the stage to examine women's leadership in more detail in Chapter 3.

The answer to the question, "Shall the Sisters Speak?," has been debated vigorously for many years. The periodicals indicate that this subject first appeared in 1840 and was a frequently recurring topic for the next fifty-five years. The "woman question," was an important issue for the Disciples of Christ movement, though one might miss its importance and existence if relying on the most widely recognized general histories of the Disciples of Christ.¹⁰

George G. Beazley Jr., Disciples scholar, in The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): An Interpretative Examination in the Cultural Context, offers a helpful model for viewing the controversy over women's leadership in the larger framework of the movement's history. The controversy is most clearly seen in two of Beazley's periods; "Creative Beginnings" (1804-1866) and "Disciples Scholasticism" (1866-1917).¹¹

Turning now to the controversy, W.T. Moore, Disciples historian and scholar, in his Comprehensive History of the Disciples of Christ, suggested that in the early days of the movement women took no very active part.¹²

¹⁰ Moore, Garrison and DeGroot, and McAllister and Tucker are identified by this writer as authors of widely recognized general historical works on Disciples of Christ. These works are familiar to a broad Disciples audience including ministers, seminarians, and laypersons.

¹¹ George G. Beazley Jr., The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): An Interpretative Examination in the Cultural Context (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1973), 19 and 27.

¹² Moore, 638.

He acknowledged:

It is true they went to church, even more than the men did, and they helped to sing during the public services on the Lord's Day, and also at the prayer meetings. But they were not encouraged to take a public part in anything else, though their private contributions to the collection basket were gratefully received by the "keepers of the faith."¹³

Moore observed that Paul's exhortation for the women to keep silent was uppermost on the brethren's minds and that women were an important but silent part of the movement.¹⁴ Moore indicated that it was providential that women did not seek leadership in the early days because the premature arousal of this question might have interfered with important developments in the movement.¹⁵

While women may not have had a very active or public leadership role, the question regarding woman's place was breaking out in the first period between 1804 and 1866, particularly in the latter half. The controversy intensified in the second period (1866-1917), as will be seen in the letters and articles that follow.

Beazley described the ethos of the first period, "Creative Beginnings" in this way: "The general spirit of the time was one of rebellion against authority and a passion for seeking new solutions to old problems."¹⁶ The Revolution had been successful and part of the self-understanding of the new country was religious freedom. Important to the developing cultural ethos was the frontier, inspiring a vision of expansion into vast territories

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Beazley, 20.

waiting to be conquered. Disciples men and women were influenced by the rebelliousness of this age and the call of the frontier.

From the beginning, Disciples leaders championed the right of individuals to read scripture and exercise the right of private judgment. These basic ideas are expressed in the "Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery" by Barton W. Stone and others, as well as Thomas Campbell's "Declaration and Address."¹⁷ Familiarity with the Bible was as much a characteristic of the laity as it was of the clergy.¹⁸ This milieu of religious freedom, the vast range of possibility encountered on the frontier, and questioning authority encouraged people to read and interpret scripture. In such an environment women and men were bound to raise the question of women's roles sooner or later.

The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the beginnings of industrialization creating increased economic freedom for working women. Women's education, a growing concern, became possible when Oberlin College opened its doors to all students without reference to sex or race in 1833. Mount Holyoke, a women's seminary, opened in 1837; as the years progressed, other schools opened their doors to women.¹⁹

At the same time, many women emerged as religious leaders. In the early 1800s, the Shakers, revering a female leader, Mother Ann Lee, settled in Ohio and spread through the frontier area into Indiana and Kentucky. The Shakers shared this common territory with the Disciples of Christ. The 1840s witnessed the formation of the Seventh-Day Adventist headed by

¹⁷ See McAllister and Tucker, 76-79 and 111-114.

¹⁸ Beazley, 24.

¹⁹ Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 29-31.

Ellen G. White.²⁰ On September 15, 1853, the Congregational Church of South Butler, New York, ordained Antoinette Brown. She has the distinction of being the first Protestant woman ordained in the United States.²¹

Women began organizing during this period. The first Women's Rights Convention met in 1848. The Women's Union Missionary Society was established in 1861. The Y.W.C.A. began its work in 1866. Women became involved in the abolition movement at this time.²²

Women organizing, preaching, being ordained, and entering into higher education, challenged the traditional understanding of woman's place and opened new and exciting possibilities for women. Between 1804 and 1866, these events and persons in the culture at large would have been known in varying degrees to the women and men of the Disciples movement. The presence of women in expanded leadership roles in the secular arena, as well as in a variety of religious groups, certainly influenced Disciples women, offering them role models to shape their growing interest in what women could do in the church.

Elizabeth A Hartsfield, in an essay on women's place in the history of the Disciples movement, quoted an early reference to the woman question in 1840, just eight years after the union of the Campbell-Stone movements

²⁰ Edwin Scott Gaustad, A Religious History of America (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 397-98.

²¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds., The Nineteenth Century: A Documentary History, vol. 1 of Women and Religion in America (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 206.

²² Gaustad, 398.

formed the Disciples of Christ.²³ On August 5, 1840, a gentleman from Ohio, who signed himself as "J.C.A.," wrote Alexander Campbell:

A question has been agitated in some of the churches of a delicate nature, and seemed likely to produce much disaffection. I would be gratified and I believe the brotherhood satisfied, could you be induced to give us an essay on the subject in the Harbinger. The question is, Have the sisters a right to teach? If so, Who? When? Where? In other words, Have the sisters a right to deliver lectures, exhortations, and prayers in the public assembly of the church of God?²⁴

In a surprisingly brief reply, Campbell answered; "Paul says 'I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to learn in silence. (1 Tim. ii:12.)' I submit to Paul and teach the same lesson."²⁵

Hartsfield also cited, from the same year, the report of a committee created to study the question, "Should all children under six years of age be placed under female instruction?" The report of the committee was published in the Christian Preacher. Among other things, the report concluded that, "... because of their natural sprightliness of character, the superior shape of their tongues, females talk with greater facility and with more clearness than males," therefore children under six should be placed with women.²⁶

Struggling with the scriptural message of Paul concerning women soon raised the question as to whether women could sing hymns, pray in worship

²³ Elizabeth A. Hartsfield, "Shall the Sisters Speak?," Women in the Church: A Symposium on the Service and Status of Women Among the Disciples of Christ (Lexington, Ky.: College of the Bible, 1953), 5.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 6.

²⁶ Ibid.

services, and receive communion. Campbell opined that singing, praying, and communion were appropriate for women, but "... taking the lead or precedence in any of these in the Christian assemblies is not allowed by Paul."²⁷

W.K. Pendleton and Brother Faurot exchanged letters in the Millenial Harbinger regarding women's right to speak in public worship. Pendleton was not surprised that "a little of these revolutionary elements" of women's rights should surface in the church.²⁸ He maintained that women must "keep silence" according to scripture and that it was "disgraceful to women to speak publicly in the congregation."²⁹

Brother Faurot affirmed women's right to have a more vocal part in the leadership of worship. He asserted that women were:

Last at the Cross, first at the sepulcher, first to announce the resurrection to the disciples, prominent in the first great prayer meeting (Acts 1:5), aiding in the establishment of the church, ever ready to aid the Apostles in their work (Rom. 16:12), and encourage the saints, . . .³⁰

In closing he asked, "... who shall deny her the privilege of praising her Lord, and speaking of His goodness to her?"³¹

In Beazley's first period, relatively few articles and letters addressed the woman question. The above examples indicate that the question was being raised and voices being heard through the periodicals. Not yet a

²⁷ Ibid., 7.

²⁸ Ibid., 10-11.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

widespread movement, articles written during the second period show the growing interest and controversy over women among Disciples.

The period of "Disciples Scholasticism" begins in 1866, the year of Alexander Campbell's death. According to Beazley, the creativity of this period found expression in evangelism and the development of the overseas mission work.³² As has been noted earlier, the economic freedom of women, occasioned by the industrial revolution, and the education of women, marked by their entrance into higher education, contributed to the awakening of the woman question for Disciples women and men. The Civil War influenced the roles women could fill in public and private life. While the men were away, women assumed greater responsibilities in family and business matters. They discovered in many cases that they were capable. Some wanted even greater responsibilities and rights in the church!

The period of "Disciples Scholasticism" was characterized by a growing theological conservatism with thought flowing along the "channels dug by Campbell and Scott."³³ Seeking to restore the "primitive New Testament" form of the church was a major focus for Disciples. Looking to the New Testament for answers to questions regarding theology and practice was not as simple as some may have hoped. Addressing these issues, Disciples soon discovered the problem of biblical interpretation which led to further controversy. One of the many mottos of the Disciples movement was "Where the scriptures speak, we speak; where the scriptures are silent, we are silent." For conservatives, the "silence" was binding and restrictive when

³² Beazley, 27.

³³ Ibid.

addressing issues. Moderates and liberals viewed the "silence" as permissive rather than restrictive.³⁴

Out of the common and ongoing life of the growing Disciples movement, fights arose over the use of instrumental music in worship, the practice of a settled and salaried pastor in the local church, and the organization of societies for ministry beyond the local church.³⁵ These issues widened the rift between the moderate, or liberal, mainstream Disciples and the more conservative group, which formally broke away and formed the Churches of Christ (non-instrumental), officially recognized as a separate body in 1906.³⁶

While the woman question was not included in the list of controversial issues identified by historians McAllister and Tucker as contributing to the division, women's leadership was nonetheless an issue inspiring controversy during the same historical period and inviting the attention of many Disciples. In common with the issues named above, the woman question involved Biblical interpretation, the practice of ministry, and the ordering of the church for ministry. An important task for Disciples is to reexamine the movement's history with particular attention to the ways that the woman question influenced the church. This question has not been adequately addressed in the histories of the Disciples of Christ for its impact on the movement, nor for its influence on the division.³⁷

³⁴ McAllister and Tucker, 237-38.

³⁵ Beazley, 31.

³⁶ McAllister and Tucker, 251-52.

³⁷ I am indebted to Dr. Lester G. McAllister who shared his wisdom on this point in a personal conversation with the writer on Feb. 5, 1988, saying that in his opinion the controversy over women was a separate issue unrelated to the others.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the United States experienced change and growth. The frontier was shrinking, the population increasing, and beginning a shift from rural to urban. Women were still organizing and the women's rights movement voiced its demands with increasing zeal. Mrs. Zeralda G. Wallace, a Disciple from Indiana, provided significant leadership in the state temperance movement which led to the formation of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) in 1874.³⁸ Mrs. Wallace claimed a personal friendship with Frances Willard, an early leader of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and often roomed with her at temperance meetings and conventions. Wallace began her career as a lecturer after the age of 57 to address the evil of alcohol. She spoke often on temperance and women's suffrage.³⁹ During this period, Mary Baker Eddy founded the Christian Science religion, in 1866.⁴⁰

Marcia M. B. Goodwin was the first female Disciples editor. She published several women's periodicals and ended her career as the editor of Missionary Tidings, the monthly publication of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions (C.W.B.M.).⁴¹ Significant episodes of women in leadership in this period include a woman in publishing, the founding of the C.W.B.M. in 1874, the ordination of three female missionaries in 1883, and the ordination of the first Disciples woman, Mrs. Clara Celestea Hale Babcock in 1888. In the midst of the controversy, women created leadership stories. Contiguous with these hallmark events for Disciples women, the question of woman's place

³⁸ McAllister and Tucker, 291.

³⁹ Henry K. Shaw, Hoosier Disciples (St. Louis: Bethany, 1966), 221.

⁴⁰ Gaustad, 239.

⁴¹ McAllister and Tucker, 223.

was raised frequently in letters and articles in the Christian Standard and the Christian-Evangelist. The lively debate in these periodicals illustrates how Disciples addressed the woman question.

A person signing himself or herself "J.G.," wrote in 1868 on the "Ministry of Women and Official Designations." This person "... wishes to see in every congregation 'Elder Women' of suitable qualifications, set apart -- at least by the uplifted hand of every member of the body -- as official members to visit the more youthful members of their own sex. . . ." ⁴² "J.G.'s" article is one example indicating that the woman question was expanding in Disciples circles to include the search for suitable leadership roles for women in the church. A subsequent series of articles in 1872, by Isaac Errett, editor of the Christian Standard, addressed the question of what women might do to labor in the gospel. He began:

The religious press is just now gravely occupied with this question. Mr. Cuyler of Brooklyn, invited a Miss Smiley -- a gifted lady of the Society of Friends -- to occupy his pulpit, whereupon the ecclesiastical authorities of his church called him to a reckoning and this excited a general discussion of the propriety of women assuming the office of public teachers.⁴³

His question was, "Shall women preach?"; his conclusion was no.

Errett's next article, "Shall Women Pray and Prophecy?", stated that while they may have done so, he believed there was a prohibition against women publicly exercising their gifts, because "... modesty and subordination are the glory and safety of women."⁴⁴ Errett maintained that:

⁴² "J.G.," "Ministry of Women and Official Designations," Christian Standard, 8 Feb. 1868: 42.

⁴³ Isaac Errett, "Shall Women Preach?," Christian Standard, 16 Mar. 1872: 84-85.

⁴⁴ Isaac Errett, "Shall Women Pray and Prophecy?," Christian Standard, 23 Mar. 1872: 92.

... the duties associated with public teaching and ruling call for masculine rigor and sturdiness, rather than feminine delicacy and sentimentality, and make a drain alike on the muscular and nervous systems that men can hardly endure and women as a class could not endure at all.

The question of woman's preaching is not in our judgment one of much practical importance, inasmuch as, settle it which way you will, there will never be much of it. Nature is against it. The constitution of society forbids it. The duties of maternity put it largely out of the question. In the long run nature will hold us level to our sphere.⁴⁵

How then may women labor in the gospel? Errett suggested such places as the home circle and neighborhood, the press (like Sister Goodwin), Sunday School teaching, Bible Study, women's groups for prayer, and benevolent ministries such as calling and "acts of mercy."⁴⁶

In 1874, with the founding of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions, women created a place where they could exercise leadership, and among their strongest supporters was Isaac Errett. After speaking to Mrs. Caroline Neville Pearre, he gave his full support to the organization that she and other women founded to extend the mission of the church. In the context of missions, the C.W.B.M. had established an acceptable way for women to labor in the gospel. He urged the "brotherhood" to "help those women."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Isaac Errett, "How May Women Labor in the Gospel?" Christian Standard, 30 Mar. 1872: 100-01, and, "How May Women Labor in the Gospel? [conclusion]," 6 April 1872: 108.

⁴⁷ Isaac Errett, "Help Those Women," Christian Standard, 11 July 1874: 220.

In 1875, Elijah Goodwin, editor and husband of Marcia Goodwin, mentioned above, wrote in favor of women preaching "for the edification and comfort of saints and the conversion of sinners."⁴⁸ However, he also maintained that women must remain subject to their husbands and could not rule or speak on questions of church governance.⁴⁹

Two years later, a young woman signing herself as "S." wrote the Christian Standard concerning "Women as Preachers." She confessed:

From the day I first realized that the death of Christ upon the cross was more than the death of a martyr, that He died not simply unjustly, but because He saved humanity and willingly laid down His life that we might live, I have desired to preach the gospel. I was too young then to know anything of why women did not preach.⁵⁰

She recounted how she asked questions about the matter, was told no, and accepted it. With further struggle and study she decided it was right for women to preach, though she had not yet begun preaching.⁵¹

In 1880, no less a personage than Mrs. Alexander Campbell entered the fray and strongly stated ". . . woman is not allowed to preach amongst them and I trust the knowledge of God's word and obedience to it, will lead our sisters to abandon this practice, and consider it God's will."⁵² Like her husband, she submitted to Paul on this matter.

⁴⁸ Elijah Goodwin, "Woman Preaching," The Christian, 8 July 1875: 2-3.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ "S.," "Women as Preachers," Christian Standard, 31 Mar. 1877: 98.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Mrs. Alexander Campbell, "Women Preachers," Christian Standard, 18 Dec. 1880: 402.

A sister signing herself "Priscilla," challenged Mrs. Campbell. She pointed out:

. . . Sister Campbell admits that she herself is guilty of the indiscretion of preaching Christ in her kitchen, in her parlor, in steamboats, railroads and stagecoaches, and is the pulpit more sacred than these?⁵³

Priscilla further argued that gender went unmentioned in connection with the seventy Christ sent out, so women could have been among those disciples. Quoting from Acts, she reminded readers and Mrs. Campbell that scripture affirmed that "your daughters shall prophecy." She ended her piece with this question; if it is by scriptural authority that we deny woman's right to preach, by what authority do we admit women to the Lord's Table?⁵⁴

Mrs. Campbell answered promptly; she firmly asserted that Paul said, "I suffer not a woman to teach." She argued that after Stephen's death, when many went about preaching the word, they were not necessarily preaching or teaching in the church, just sharing the story of Christ. In regard to the Lord's Supper, women, also being sinners, were allowed in the church to keep the Lord's Supper. She reminded Priscilla and readers that "where the scriptures are silent, we are silent."⁵⁵

Mrs. Marcia M. B. Goodwin, editor and publisher, added her opinion about women's preaching in a creative way. The Christian Standard printed her piece entitled "Hens Cannot Crow." The story is set in a chicken yard.

⁵³ "Priscilla," "Women Preachers," Christian Standard, 15 Jan. 1881: 18.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Mrs. Alexander Campbell, "Women Preachers Again," Christian Standard, 5 Feb. 1881: 42.

Our heroine is a bantam hen who, one morning, feeling full of joy and wonder, let out a crow. The other chickens were appalled, promptly called an assembly, and drafted a resolution concerning hen's rights. These are:

1. Hens have all the rights they need or desire!
2. It is a hen's first duty to prepare the family rations.
3. A model hen never finds fault if the master is late.
4. She does not complain if he trades off some of the children's grubs for nice green tobacco worms.
5. It is the duty of a mother hen to always be nicely dressed and set an example for her chicks.
6. It is a hen's duty to be modest and retiring; but if she has a sweet voice, there is no objection to her singing in public.
7. If she occasionally finds an extra nice grub. . . she shows the finest and loftiest sentiments of henhood in presenting it to her liege lord, that he may have strength to do the crowing.⁵⁶

Mrs. Goodwin's talent for sarcasm and her wit are evident in this piece. Following the hen story she wrote an article that left no doubt where she stood on the woman question. She stated:

Personally, I am willing to be banned if thereby, I may be counted worthy, even to kiss the hem of the garment of those dear sisters who are able, mentally and physically, to stand before the world as preachers of the Gospel.

How shall any man dare to say to a God-fearing, devoted woman, "You have no right to bear the message of salvation to those sitting in darkness," when the dear Saviour has displaced the chains of slavery by the white robes of freedom, and the command, "Preach the gospel," was to all believers for all time?⁵⁷

⁵⁶ M.M.B. Goodwin, "From My Standpoint: Hens Cannot Crow," Christian Standard, 2 April 1881: 107.

⁵⁷ M.M.B. Goodwin, "From My Standpoint," Christian Standard, 4 June 1881: 176.

An important event in 1883 took the discussion of the woman question into the issue of ordination. In August, at Island Park, Indiana, the Indiana Christian Sunday School Association ordained three missionary couples to their work. They were George T. and Josephine W. Smith, C. E. and Laura D. Garst, and M. D. and Mary L. Adams. Isaac Errett participated in the ordination. He described the service as including a charge, the laying on of hands by men and women, a prayer, giving the hand of Christian fellowship by the assembled community, and the Lord's Supper.⁵⁸

John C. Miller of Indiana wrote Errett expressing his opposition to this event. He objected to the ordination occurring at a meeting rather than in a local church, ordaining G.T. Smith a second time, and women's participation in the laying on of hands and being ordained.⁵⁹ Exchanging letters with Miller during the next two months, Errett defended the ordination on all these points as appropriate. Errett was clear that the women were ordained as "missionaries, preachers, and teachers of the word of God" and it was fitting to ordain them to that work.⁶⁰

Errett's letters indicate that his position now included a larger role for women, such as preaching, teaching, and ordination. While he did not reach a point of supporting women's access to the pulpits of America, he did continue to support women in expanded roles in the mission field.

In the midst of the ongoing controversy, Mrs. Clara Celestea Hale Babcock was ordained in 1888 and continued her career in local church

⁵⁸ Isaac Errett, "Island Park," Christian Standard, 11 Aug. 1883: 324.

⁵⁹ John C. Miller, "Ordination," Christian Standard, 15 Sept. 1883: 362.

⁶⁰ Isaac Errett, "Ordination," Christian Standard, 15 Sept. 1883: 364.

ministry. Babcock is identified as the first Disciples woman to be ordained.⁶¹ Research indicates that the Island Park ordination of the three women to mission work in 1883 was certainly earlier. It may be the case that Mrs. Babcock was the first ordained woman known and recognized by Disciples historians as a local church pastor. As Disciples engage in further historical research to uncover women's stories, new evidence may be found to document that other women were ordained in this earlier time period. In Chapter 3, Mrs. Babcock's story will be explored in more detail.

Mrs. Babcock wrote in the Christian Standard regarding her qualifications for ministry in light of the controversy:

My eye has caught from time to time contributions from the fertile brains of my strong brethren, with some editorial hints against women's work in the ministry, as well as some words of encouragement. Regardless of all this I have patiently and steadily worked on, and can say with the apostle, none of these things move me, can truly say, I never preach to empty pews or a restless congregation; our audiences have demanded enlarged buildings.⁶²

She continued in her article with a report of her year's work which included adding 96 new members, preaching 240 sermons, conducting 16 funerals and 12 weddings, and making 470 visits. In the course of this work, she traveled 1500 miles, maintained her health and did not miss an appointment for four years.⁶³

Perhaps this letter by Babcock stirred John B. Briney to write an article that appeared shortly after on Paul and women. He observed with

⁶¹ McAllister and Tucker, 263.

⁶² Clara C.H. Babcock, "From the Field," Christian Standard, 2 Jan. 1892: 21.

⁶³ Ibid.

concern "that there is a growing tendency at this time in the direction of clothing women in the ministerial garb. . . ." ⁶⁴ He examined Paul's teachings and determined that women have no right to preach. ⁶⁵

In a lengthy reply to Briney's article Babcock began:

It is a question in my mind if Bro. Briney could have chosen any subject that would have arrested thought, set brains and pen in rapid motions, and so aroused American womanhood, as his interpretation of Paul on the woman question.

This is the question that must be met by the religious world, and the sooner the better for the church and humanity. Nearly five years ago, after careful study and prayer and mature deliberation, I drew these conclusions, based on the word of God. ⁶⁶

Her conclusions drawn from scripture began with the presupposition that the "word must harmonize." ⁶⁷ Citing examples such as Priscilla, Phebe, and the women at the tomb, she stated that women did teach and preach in the New Testament witness. She challenged the interpretation of Paul's injunctions for women to remain silent and determined that these teachings were not binding at this time in history. ⁶⁸

Expressing concern over the loss of women's gifts in the church she pointed out:

⁶⁴ John B. Briney, "Paul and Women," Christian Standard, 13 Feb. 1892: 136.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Clara C.H. Babcock, "Woman in the Pulpit," Christian Standard, 4 June 1892: 482.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

For many centuries, a mighty force has been silenced contrary to God's plan. If woman, with her magnetic influence, her tender pleadings, as well as her great intuitive powers had been heard from rostrum and pulpit, as well as pastoral oversight, in the centuries that are past, the church would have been well balanced with more consecrated men as well as women; all this according to natural laws and divine economy.⁶⁹

In her closing remarks she responded to a male pastor who questioned her ability to withstand the physical rigors of the ministry. Mrs. Babcock dismissed this concern with personal experience:

I have fully demonstrated woman's power, physically, as over these three years I have baptized all candidates presenting themselves. I have stood in ice water, and baptized many at once, in and out, any time the occasion demanded -- mid summer's heat and winter's cold, both in the baptistry and rivers. Have never taken cold or been hoarse in the work; am now forty-three years old, the mother of six children, and every living relative of mine has been brought to faith and obedience. . . . My labors have resulted in the conversion of over three hundred, and I am still determined to go forward preaching the word. . . .⁷⁰

Mrs. Babcock stood firmly in the group of Disciples who represented the moderate or liberal viewpoint and questioned the "literal" interpretation of Paul's instructions for women to keep silent. She challenged the cultural understanding of woman's capabilities with her own life experience in ministry. As an ordained woman pastor she added her piece to the controversy with powerful arguments from theological reflection, Biblical exegesis, and personal experience.

A lengthy debate between John B. Briney and T.W. Caskey serves as a final illustration of the controversy regarding women's leadership in the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

nineteenth century. This periodical debate, published by the Christian-Evangelist, addressed this proposition:

According to New Testament teaching a woman may be an evangelist or pastor of a church and do any work in the ministry, or fill any office in the church that a man may do or fill.⁷¹

T.W. Caskey argued affirmatively and John B. Briney negatively.

The debate included 10 articles by each writer and appeared in the Christian-Evangelist over a two year period in 1892 and 1893. Between journalistic potshots at one another and a detailed exegesis of New Testament passages by Paul relating to women, J.B. Briney concluded that a woman could not be a bishop or a pastor, and as there is no scriptural difference between the two, the proposition they were debating could not be affirmed.⁷² He called once again on the "guiding star of this Reformation:" "where the scriptures speak, we speak; where the scriptures are silent, we are silent."⁷³ His clear understanding was that there was no Biblical justification for women to serve as pastors, evangelists, or in the offices of the church, because there is no evidence that this happened in the primitive church.⁷⁴

Caskey emerged from the debate affirming that women could preach and serve as pastors and evangelists. With conviction, he stated:

⁷¹ T.W. Caskey, "Woman and Preaching: Caskey's First Article," Christian-Evangelist, 6 Oct. 1892: 630.

⁷² J.B. Briney, "Woman and Preaching: Briney's Ninth Reply," Christian-Evangelist, 2 Mar. 1893: 135.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

It is a fact women do preach and convert men and women to Christ. That God should make it a sin to do so is an idea that can only live in a mind imbued with the last and worst relic of a barbarous age. It is an intellectual monstrosity. She preaches to public assemblies as well as privately.⁷⁵

Eloquently, he concluded:

Seal the lips of women before assemblies, and one-half the light of the religious world is turned into darkness, one-half the blessings that flow from their talks, in crowded halls cease to enlighten human minds and purify human hearts.⁷⁶

His one restriction on women was that they could not rule their husbands or serve as bishops; in all other areas they had equal rights with men.⁷⁷

The periodical resources of the twentieth century indicate a decreasing number of articles and letters addressing the woman question in the Christian Standard and the Christian-Evangelist. The articles appearing in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century indicate that Disciples, after expanding the roles of women in leadership, were now drawing the line at the question of women's roles in church governance. Women could serve in mission work and exercise public leadership in worship, but they could not usurp authority over men in the decision making structures of the church.

Lela Taylor, writing in 1934, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions, noted with concern the small number of women between 25-40 years of age active in the local church. Reflecting on the past, she observed that "in the earlier years the church

⁷⁵ T.W. Caskey, "Woman and Preaching: Caskey's Tenth and Last Article (Concluded)," Christian-Evangelist, 23 Mar. 1893: 183-84.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

offered to women the best of all opportunities for development and growth and for participation in world affairs."⁷⁸ Believing that this was no longer true, she argued that other organizations offered women greater opportunities for leadership and growth. Taylor's article indicted the church for its failure to offer women significant opportunities for leadership.⁷⁹ Women had little voice in the decision making structures of the church because "few churches allow them as full voting members of the board."⁸⁰ She observed that women participated fully in the national structures of the church in decision making; could the same leadership appear at the local level?⁸¹

Nearly 20 years later, the Rev. Mossie Wycker, Vice President of the International Convention of the Disciples of Christ and the Chairperson of the General Department of the United Christian Women of the National Council of Churches, examined women's leadership roles in a study on church women. She surveyed the leadership roles of women in policymaking bodies of the church, in the ordained ministry, and in the national and world arenas. Voicing concern that the church was losing many of its gifted women, like Lela Taylor, she identified the cause as women's limited access to leadership. Wycker observed that "... there are not many women who serve at policy-

⁷⁸ Lela Taylor, "New Tasks for the Day to Come: A Program for Church Women in the Future," Christian-Evangelist, 23 Aug. 1934: 1087-88.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1088.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

making levels of the church and few are used to give major addresses on convention programs."⁸²

Moving to address ordination, Wycker tread carefully, aware that she was raising "... a very highly controversial subject."⁸³ In this chapter on women and ordination Wycker mentioned Antoinette Brown, the first woman ordained in the United States, as evidence that ordaining women was not a present innovation, but went back 100 years.⁸⁴ Wycker called for the whole church to reconsider ordination for women and particularly challenged the women of the church to reconsider their opposition to the women "... who believe they are called to become ministers of the gospel. . . ."⁸⁵

Shall the sisters speak? Armed with New Testament quotes and culture and practice, Disciples vigorously addressed the woman question early in their developing history. The periodical resources examined in this chapter illustrate the growing controversy over women's leadership between 1866 and 1917. Beginning with the question of whether or not women might speak, pray, sing, or teach in the church, the controversy gave form and structure to women's entry into leadership roles.

The question of women's leadership goes almost without mention in the Disciples histories written by Moore, Garrison and DeGroot, and McAllister and Tucker. The resources in the Disciples periodicals presented

⁸² Mossie A. Wycker, Church Women in the Scheme of Things (St. Louis: Bethany, 1953), 27.

⁸³ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 63.

in this chapter challenge the silence of these authors on this important nineteenth century issue and invite further research.

The woman question was a major concern for Disciples, particularly in the last half of the nineteenth century. This chapter illustrates the controversy over women's leadership in references from 27 articles carried in the Christian Standard, the Christian-Evangelist, and the Millennial Harbinger. Some 400-450 articles related to the woman question are listed in the indices to the Christian Standard and the Christian-Evangelist alone. If in fact the periodicals were important in shaping the Disciples of Christ movement, the numerical weight of these articles suggests the importance of this issue and challenges the church to reexamine women's contributions to its story.

In the midst of the controversy, the story of women in leadership emerged. Marcia Goodwin served in her capacity as writer and editor. Women founded the Christian Woman's Board of Missions and engaged in mission work. Mrs. Babcock, served as an ordained local church pastor. Men and women challenged a Biblical interpretation and a cultural understanding that sought to limit the ministry of women in the church. Moving from the controversy about what leadership roles women could assume, the research presented in Chapter 3 will offer accounts of Disciples women who provided leadership in important ways.

CHAPTER 3

The Periods of Disciples Women's Leadership

Disciples women and their male supporters were not content with limiting their time and energies to discussing and writing about the woman question. As the Disciples movement grew, thoughtful persons called for expanded women's roles. Women created opportunities for females to exercise leadership when they established the Christian Woman's Board of Missions and the National Benevolent Association. In this same period, women assumed pastoral responsibility in local churches and later filled positions at the state and national levels of the church's growing organization.

Aligned against these women was a formidable opposition that based its position on the Biblical witness of the New Testament and the nineteenth century's concept of a woman's place. Opponents of women's leadership invited supporters to show clear and literal New Testament examples illustrating women serving as pastors, elders, evangelists, or leaders in the early church. In the absence of such proof, the opposition suggested that women must be content with using their gifts in their own sphere.

Supporters of women in leadership also used New Testament scriptural references to point to women in the New Testament who had preached, prophesied, and assisted Paul in his labors. In light of this scriptural evidence, these supporters affirmed the leadership of nineteenth century women who served God according to their gifts which included preaching, teaching, and public leadership.

As the Disciples movement grew, churches were established and the need to address the question of the ongoing ministry in the local churches

was raised. Another concern was shaped around the need and desire of the church to address mission and ministry beyond the capability of the individual local church. Out of the controversy over women's rights and responsibilities in the church and in the context of concern for ministry and mission, women began to extend their leadership and write their stories into the larger Disciples story.

There were no serious and sustained objections, in the nineteenth century, to women responding to the gospel with their faith commitment, becoming members of existing churches, and working behind the scenes to further the ministry of the church. In fact, members of the fairer sex were encouraged and expected to be interested in things moral and spiritual. Women, however, were not satisfied with being mere participants in worship and guardians of the home and family. They were inspired and empowered by the gospel message of the Christian faith. Their experience of reading the Bible and claiming the faith story of women and men, found in scripture, led them to seek a more active role in the faith community's ministry of Jesus Christ.

The term leadership as used in this project, includes the activity and service of women in the ministry of the church beyond their roles as participants in worship and their influence in the home. In this view of leadership, these activities encompass ordained and lay women involved in such tasks as preaching, teaching, mission work, organizing churches and voluntary societies for mission and ministry, public speaking, administration, and professional and elected leadership at the local, state, and national levels of church life. While affirming the significant contributions made by the informal leadership of women in their home spheres as wives and mothers, and behind the scenes in the life of the faith community, the focus of this

chapter will be on the formal, public, and denominational leadership of women in the Disciples movement. These more specific leadership categories point to the official roles that women filled in the local churches, in the developing organizations, as well as the leadership they gave as professional staff and elected leaders at the local, state and national levels of church life. This definition of leadership incorporates the many ways women found in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to offer their gifts and talents to further God's Kingdom.

The story of controversy over women's leadership illustrated in Chapter 2, now turns to the story of Disciples women in leadership. In Chapter 2, the controversy was viewed in the context of Beazley's periods in order to view the woman question in the broader context of Disciples history. The periods of women's leadership examined in this chapter are defined by milestone events for women.

These periods begin with the establishment of the Disciples of Christ as a movement and then are shaped around the establishment of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions in 1874 and its merger into the broader ministries of the Disciples of Christ in 1920. These time periods will offer a framework from which to view the development of women's leadership as it emerged in the early days of the movement, grew with the development of women's work in missions, and declined following the merger of women's mission work into the broader ministries of the Disciples of Christ. Using the image of a plant, these time frames are as follows:

Gestation -- 1832 - 1874

Full Flowering -- 1874 - 1920

Withering -- 1920 - Present.

The first period, Gestation, begins in 1832, with the merger of the Stone-Campbell movements into the Disciples of Christ, and ends in 1874, with the formation of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions (C.W.B.M.). During these years, the question of women's leadership arose and controversy began to intensify, as illustrated in Chapter 2. The seeds of women taking an active and expanded role in the ministry of the church were sown in this period as attention was turned to what women could do in the ministry of leadership. These seeds blossomed into the C.W.B.M., one of the most powerful stories of Disciples women in leadership.

The second period, Full Flowering, takes the story from the point of the C.W.B.M.'s formation in 1874, through its history as a separate organization led by women, and ends with the merger in 1920 of C.W.B.M. with several other mission and benevolence organizations of the church to form the United Christian Missionary Society. During this period, the first Disciples women were ordained and women assumed leadership positions in the developing state and national work of the C.W.B.M.

The third period, Withering, takes the story from the creation of United Christian Missionary Society in 1920, and it points to a gradual decline of women in formal and public leadership in the decades following. The decline of women's leadership is illustrated clearly at the national level of church structure and ministry. Women had served as leaders at every level in the C.W.B.M structure. However, in the United Christian Missionary Society, women were not well represented in the highest professional positions in that organization. Research presented in this chapter will trace the gains and losses of women in professional and elected leadership roles, the fading of the controversy, and the renewal of interest in the status of women in the church in recent decades.

Gestation (1832-1874)

Many seeds were planted in the religio-social context of the nineteenth century as well as in the particular Disciples context. Seeds were planted in fertile soil and received the nurture and care necessary to grow. In addition to greater economic power occasioned by the development of industry and greater educational opportunities for women, the development of a middle class was an important factor influencing women in this first period. Historian, Dorothy Bass, noted that the "rising middle class" created a body of women with time as well as the need to contribute something to society beyond their roles as wives and mothers.¹

Education, economic power, and free time were the environment, or soil, in which the seeds of women's leadership gestated. Bass pointed out women's need to contribute beyond the home sphere: "Bereft of pre-industrial usefulness these women rejected passive isolation in nonproductive homes for exhilarating responsibilities as 'co-workers with God in spreading the Gospel'. . . ."² Closely connected to, and inseparable from, these factors was the fervor of nineteenth century Protestantism with its revival spirit. This, when added to the energy and ethos of a new political experiment in democracy and an emphasis on individual freedom and responsibility, had a powerful influence on raising the woman question.

The possibility of women's leadership rested upon a two-edged sword. On one edge was a near deification of woman which placed her in the position of serving as guardian of moral values due to her fine spiritual

¹ Dorothy C. Bass, "Their Prodigious Influence," Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, eds. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor L. McLaughlin (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 282.

² Ibid., 285.

nature. A common and widely held view of nineteenth-century woman is described by scholars as the "cult of domesticity" or "cult of true womanhood."³ This stereotyping of women identified her as "submissive, morally pure, and pious."⁴ The ideal woman was a mother and a wife and her "sphere" of influence was the home where she lived out her sacred vocation as mother.⁵ In her sphere she was not inferior to man; her domain and role was complementary to his.⁶ In this view, women were seen as morally and spiritually superior to men and as such were responsible for instilling moral and spiritual values in children.⁷ Barbara MacHaffie, historian, in her examination of women in Christian tradition, pointed out a question raised by this cult: "if indeed women were morally and spiritually superior to men, then why should they be obedient?"⁸

This moves us to the other edge of the sword, a limitation on what women could do. Based on cultural mores and backed by scriptural proof, women found themselves limited to their sphere. In other words, the brethren sought a woman's refined and spiritual touch to participate in changing the world in a very specific and narrowly defined manner.

Disciples subscribed to the cult of domesticity along with the rest of nineteenth century America. O.W. Topliffe wrote in this vein in the Gospel

³ Barbara J. MacHaffie, Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 93.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 93-95.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 93-94

⁸ Ibid., 95.

Echo in 1867. He assured women that they were not meant to be "idle spectators" in the church; as mothers of men, they could change the world in their work of "moulding characters."⁹

Seeds were planted by the brethren who failed to understand that the results might be more than expected! Bass stated it this way:

By convincing women of "their prodigious influence, and consequent responsibility, in the great work of regenerating a world lying in wickedness," churchmen who sought women's aid in spreading the Gospel had incidentally -- and inadvertently -- contributed to the emancipation of women themselves.¹⁰

She argued that religious reform was the largest and most important extrafamilial activity of middle-class women in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹¹

In this early period the idea was for women to help, not lead.¹² As women began to help, they gained confidence in their leadership skills and ministry and were less confident with clergy and male leaders whose agendas and concerns were different from their own.¹³

In the first half of the nineteenth century, women began to organize. They organized "Female Mite" societies, missionary societies, Women's rights conventions and a host of other organizations dealing with temperance, education of women, Sunday Schools, and moral reform. MacHaffie pointed

⁹ O.W. Topliffe, "Claims of the Gospel on Women," Gospel Echo, Oct., 1867: 353-355.

¹⁰ Bass, 280.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹² *Ibid.*, 286.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 296.

out that when women became involved in the anti-slavery issue they began to examine their own bondage.¹⁴

The founding fathers of the Disciples of Christ had no intention of granting women a major leadership role in the movement. Yet Disciples women were observing and participating in these organizations and were watching with interest as women began to take on a larger role in other Christian bodies.

Resources do not suggest major formal or public leadership roles for women in local congregations or in the developing structures of the movement, in the earlier years. But as the woman question was raised in the Disciples periodicals, as noted in Chapter 2, men and women began to reflect on what service was appropriate for women.

What could women do? O.W. Topliffe, in the article cited above, suggested that women could pray, influence their families, write for the religious press, speak to their friends and neighbors about the faith, share periodicals, teach by example, and move people with their tears and sacrifices.¹⁵ "Disciple," in an article for the Christian Standard written in 1867, determined that women could lead in Sunday School and prayer meetings.¹⁶ In the same year and the same periodical, John Gale urged elder women to look after younger ones, supporting and nurturing them while challenging them to remain in their sphere.¹⁷ Another writer on this same

¹⁴ MacHaffie, 101.

¹⁵ Topliffe, 354.

¹⁶ "Disciple," "Woman's Privileges in the Church," Christian Standard, 23 Feb. 1867: 57.

¹⁷ John Gale, "The Ministry of Women," Christian Standard, 16 Nov. 1867: 359.

topic expanded Gale's suggestions to include helping the pastor in visiting and deeds of mercy.¹⁸

Garrison and DeGroot, in their history of the Disciples of Christ, mention women in another leadership role just prior to the beginning of this first period of women's leadership. Though giving brief attention to women in their history, they mention an important example of women's work. They observed:

In a record almost barren of woman's touch, it is refreshing as it is commonly true, in the annals of nations and denominations to find that certain indomitable women overcame the social limitations of their time and made a unique mark among the church planters.¹⁹

Garrison and DeGroot recount the story of three "Marys": Mary Ogle, Mary Morrison, and Mary Graft. In 1815, these women organized a "Female Society for the Use of the Gospel" and hired Baptist ministers. Two years later they organized the church at Somerset Pennsylvania.²⁰ Mary Morrison, after moving to Johnstown, Pennsylvania, organized a church there in 1830.²¹

A woman whose leadership greatly influenced this era must be mentioned here: Emily Tubman of Georgia and Kentucky, a wealthy Disciples philanthropist whose life spanned the years from 1794 to 1885. After meeting Alexander Campbell and finding herself in sympathy with his

¹⁸ H.T. Anderson, "The Ministry of Women," Christian Standard, 28 Dec. 1867: 407.

¹⁹ Garrison and DeGroot, 268.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

beliefs, she was baptized in 1828. When Mrs. Tubman was widowed in 1836, she began practicing her Disciples beliefs. Mrs. Tubman gave generously to build and repair local churches, support mission work, endow education, and help individuals in a variety of ways. She personally contributed to the education of a number of young men studying for the ministry including W. T. Moore, noted Disciples historian and leader. Upon her death, she left \$30,000. to the Foreign Christian Missionary Society.²² Mrs. Tubman did not exercise an official, formal, or public style of leadership, yet her faithfulness in stewardship contributed significantly to building the ministry of the church through the education of ministers and the support of local churches and national mission work.

Toward the end of this period, a major development in American Protestantism significantly influenced Disciples women. The mission spirit stirred early in the nineteenth century and Protestant groups began forming missionary societies to carry the gospel into heathen lands. Disciples formed the American Christian Missionary Society (A.C.M.S.) in 1849, in an effort to address themselves to both home and foreign missions. The story of the American Christian Missionary Society was one of failure. Disciples leaders were unable to motivate the churches to any great degree of participation, and the A.C.M.S. was unable to extend its mission work. The A.C.M.S. even found itself in the position of closing its work due to lack of funds.²³

One of the problems faced by the American Christian Missionary Society was not so much a lack of interest or concern for missions on the part

²² J. Edward Moseley, Disciples of Christ in Georgia (St. Louis: Bethany, 1954), 134-141.

²³ Loren E. Lair, The Christian Churches and Their Work (St. Louis: Bethany, 1963), 101.

of the churches, but, rather, the issue of polity. There was a deep resistance to participation in what appeared to be the beginning of an ecclesiastical structure which was not Biblical and which introduced an assumed threat to local church autonomy.²⁴ As 1874 approached, the field of foreign missions was wide open in the Disciples movement, and concern was growing. This concern presented the opportunity for women to enter into formal and public leadership as they turned their attention to addressing the need for a Disciples mission witness.

During the first period of women's leadership, both men and women posed the question of what women could do. Disciples did not distinguish themselves from the culture at large in providing opportunities for women's leadership. Arising out of the cult of domesticity, women began to find ways to serve, moving them beyond the home sphere, but not too far. As Sunday School teachers, leaders of women's prayer meetings, ministers to one another, philanthropists and pastor's helpers, they found places for service which offered no major challenge to male superiority and male leadership and posed no threat to the scriptural mandates for women to remain silent in the churches and submissive in their homes. As church organizers, they were pushing the boundaries as they learned organizational skills; yet, they apparently relinquished preaching and pastoral oversight of the congregation to male ministers. As this period closed, women determined that they had a calling beyond the home and hearth, and they had gifts to share as leaders in the mission work of the church.

²⁴ Ibid., 103-05.

Full Flowering (1874-1920)

By 1874, women were beginning to organize mission work in many denominations. They had created local missionary societies, financing their work out of their household budgets.²⁵ During the 1860s and 1870s, women organized on a wider scale. Between 1868 and 1884, women's missionary boards or societies were formed by the Congregational Church, Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., Protestant Episcopal, Baptists, African Methodist Episcopal, Reformed Church of America, Evangelical Lutheran Church, and American Baptists.²⁶

A number of factors opened the door for women's participation in missions on a wider scale. Women felt a genuine concern for the souls of the unconverted. They took the Great Commission quite seriously and believed it was the responsibility of every Christian person to evangelize the world. They also felt a keen sense of concern for the conditions of women and children living in foreign lands, including their lack of education, food, and value as persons. Finally, women discovered that they had a unique contribution to make in the mission field. For example, in India and China, male missionaries did not have access to the women of these countries. The women were often secluded, and only women could reach them. By converting the women, the rest of the family might be won to Christ, so mission boards began to send women as missionaries in their own right.

The Christian Woman's Board of Missions of the Disciples of Christ bloomed in 1874. In a well known and often quoted story, Carolyn Neville

²⁵ Virginia L. Brereton and Christa R. Klein, "American Women in Ministry," *Women of Spirit*, eds. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor L. McLaughlin (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 304.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 305.

Pearre, resident of Indiana and wife of a minister, was having her morning devotions and giving thought to the need for a Disciples mission witness when she thought, "Why can you not do it?"²⁷ Believing this to be the prompting of God, she answered affirmatively and immediately set about the task.²⁸

Pearre began corresponding with friends and co-workers and called for women to gather at the General Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio. The brethren of the American Christian Missionary Society were delighted, and they assured the women of their support.²⁹

Seventy-five women gathered on October 21, 1874, and collected a grand total of \$430.00 to begin their mission work.³⁰ A committee met and drew up a constitution which was approved the next day.³¹ Mrs. Maria Jameson was elected President, and Mrs. Pearre was elected Corresponding Secretary of the newly formed organization.³² On the following day, the General Convention passed a resolution recognizing the Christian Woman's Board of Missions and extending their approval and support for the women's work.³³

²⁷ Lorraine Lollis, The Shape of Adam's Rib (St. Louis: Bethany, 1970), 31.

²⁸ Ibid., 32-33.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

The Christian Woman's Board of Missions considered several appeals for work in foreign and home mission fields. They finally agreed to begin with Jamaica. However, showing wisdom and prudence, they agreed to wait until they had raised their meager budget to at least \$1000.00.³⁴ Perhaps they had learned from the trials and failures of their brothers in the American Christian Missionary Society.

Beginning in 1874 with a membership of 75 and assets of \$430, the Christian Woman's Board of Missions showed remarkable growth in its years of work. By 1919, the year prior to the creation of the United Christian Missionary Society, the total accumulated offerings to the Christian Woman's Board of Missions was over \$7,000,000. for that 45 year period, and the membership totaled nearly 117,000.³⁵

From the first mission endeavor in Jamaica in 1876, the C.W.B.M. extended its work both at home and abroad. By the end of this second period, the Christian Woman's Board of Missions had established mission work in France, India, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Argentina, Liberia, New Zealand, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Africa, and China.³⁶ Home mission work included the establishment of mountain schools such as Hazel Green, work with the Negroes, the establishment of Bible Chairs at several universities, mission work with the Orientals on the West Coast, evangelistic work in several states, and the opening of the College of Missions.³⁷ The C.W.B.M. published

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ida Withers Harrison, Forty Years of Service: A History of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions, 1874-1919 (n.p.: n.p., 1920), 171-72.

³⁶ Harrison, chapters 7-12

³⁷ Ibid., 175-210.

an important periodical to interpret their mission work, to provide a resource for mission education for the local churches, and to stimulate an interest in mission work at home and abroad. Missionary Tidings, issued in 1883, with a circulation of over 40,000 in 1914, merged with several other publications in 1920 to become World Call, the periodical of the United Christian Missionary Society.³⁸

A key element in the Christian Woman's Board of Missions' success was its provision for the organization of state and local auxiliaries. By this structure, women had a significant and, in some cases, a first opportunity to be trained as local church and denominational leaders. The C.W.B.M. also provided structure for organizing young women's societies and groups of children for participation in the missionary endeavor. These groups were leadership training grounds for young women and girls.

An examination of the constitution and by-laws of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions yields two points of interest. These women saw the possibility of raising large sums of money through an accumulation of small amounts. Encouraging women to give systematically, developed good stewardship. The Board provided for the formation of auxiliary societies, with a clear understanding that the state and local societies would be subordinate to the Executive Committee.³⁹ The C.W.B.M. was structured with lines of authority and responsibility.

Not only were women managing large sums of money, developing membership, hiring missionaries, and administering numerous sites, they were making important decisions. The work required public speaking,

³⁸ Harrison, 110.

³⁹ Ibid., 178.

travel, and organizational skills. The Christian Woman's Board of Missions opened the mission field to women. Prior to the organization of women's mission boards in the U.S., women did go into the foreign field, but with few exceptions, as missionary wives. Single women were not encouraged to work abroad.⁴⁰

As the mission boards discovered the seclusion of women in certain countries in the foreign mission fields, the need for women missionaries to reach these women became a necessity. This reality opened the way for the service of single women and missionary wives. The mission field offered women an exciting possibility for ministry and leadership in this period. There were few choices other than homemaker or teacher. Once women entered this field and served as ministers and leaders in foreign lands, why not at home? The question could be raised: why not the local church?

The College of Missions, established by the Christian Woman's Board of Missions in 1909, and opening in 1910, provided a new and important opportunity for women's leadership. Women taught, served on the policy-making body, and entered as students. The College of Missions was a graduate institution offering Master of Arts and Bachelor of Divinity degrees for those preparing to serve in missions leadership.⁴¹ This was one of the educational institutions during this period that accepted women for advanced theological education.

Before considering further examples of women's leadership, it is important to note the significant role of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions in the growing story. Disciples women were not the first to enter

⁴⁰ MacHaffie, 105.

⁴¹ Harrison, 149.

the mission field, yet, in their organization, there were some firsts in the women's missionary movement of the nineteenth century. The C.W.B.M. was the first group to do both home and foreign missionary work, to employ both men and women, manage their own business, choose their fields of service, own property, and raise and administer funds.⁴²

The Christian Woman's Board of Missions was an important training ground for women at all levels of denominational leadership. The auxiliary groups in local churches trained women in conducting business, public speaking and prayer, and engaged women in the educational ministry of the local church as they kept the mission spirit alive.⁴³ Women were called as missionaries and became world travelers who engaged in ministry, often in uncomfortable and dangerous circumstances.

Women were also called to exercise formal and public leadership at the state level of the C.W.B.M. as auxiliaries were formed. The state auxiliaries elected a corresponding secretary, the chief administrative position in the organization.⁴⁴ While at first these positions were volunteer, without remuneration, they developed into salaried positions. The job description for this leadership role included expanding local women's auxiliaries, developing resources and leading mission education, and inspiring greater commitment to the missionary enterprise.⁴⁵ Bertha Mason Fuller, an ordained Disciples woman who was a missionary in Mexico, also

⁴² Lollis, 42.

⁴³ Harrison, 108.

⁴⁴ D. Newell Williams, Ministry Among Disciples: Past, Present, and Future (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1985), 23 and 25.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

served in the work of the Texas state C.W.B.M. from 1902-1907.⁴⁶ She later held the position of Corresponding Secretary for the Arkansas Women's Missionary Society.⁴⁷ Bertha Fuller was sympathetic to and deeply interested in supporting the Negro work developing during this period. She worked closely with Sarah Lou Bostick, a Black woman leader, in the C.W.B.M.'s work to develop the mission movement among Black women. Sarah Bostick served as an organizer for Black women's missionary work in Arkansas and in a number of other nearby states.⁴⁸ Women in other states were serving in this same leadership capacity, engaged in administration and oversight, development, public speaking, and education.

The names and stories of many prominent and less prominent women must go unmentioned in this survey of the C.W.B.M.'s story. The accounts of many of these women are treated more fully in the histories cited above by Harrison and Lollis, and brief mention is given in the general histories of the Disciples of Christ. Many names of women, with bits of their stories, grace the state histories and the reports of the organization. The ongoing task of Disciples will be to recover as many of these stories as we are able.

While the controversy over women's leadership occupied the periodicals during the period between 1874 and 1920, women were learning to be leaders and contributing to the church's ministry. Important to note is the fact that women had to form their own separate organization to create expanded opportunities for leadership.

⁴⁶ Colby Hall, Texas Disciples, (Ft Worth: T.C.U. Press, 1953), 140.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 213.

⁴⁸ McAllister, 92.

A second story of great significance for Disciples women is the story of an individual, Mrs. Clara Celestea Hale Babcock. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Mrs. Babcock is identified as the first Disciples woman to be ordained. Her ministry was not in mission work, but in the local church. N. S. Haynes, historian of Illinois Disciples, recorded details of Babcock's life. She was born in Fitchville, Ohio, in 1850 and reared as the daughter of a Methodist minister. At the age of twenty-five she heard Disciples evangelist, George F. Adams preach. She was won to the Disciples faith, and both Mr. and Mrs. Babcock were immersed, becoming adherents to the movement.

Haynes gave this account of how Mrs. Babcock entered the ministry:

Being in Erie on a Sunday, she was induced to speak to the Christian congregation in the forenoon. The presence and approval of God were so manifest that she was led to continue in the service of that congregation. Later, after wise counsel and mature deliberation, she was ordained to the Christian ministry in 1888.

She proved herself both a good evangelist and pastor. She has conducted twenty eight fruitful meetings and has made about fourteen hundred converts, one thousand of whom she baptized by her own hand. The little church at Erie she served altogether fifteen years.

She was the first woman in Illinois to enter the Christian ministry. In all this splendid service she has had the cordial support of her husband.⁴⁹

Babcock's obituary, written in 1925, remembers her for her successful ministry. In addition to serving churches in Erie and Thomson, Illinois, she served the church in Ellendale, North Dakota. She was the organizing pastor at Rapid City, Illinois, and just before her death she was pastor of the

⁴⁹ N.S. Haynes, History of the Disciples of Christ in Illinois (Cincinnati: Standard, 1915), 466.

Savanna, Illinois, church. Mrs. Babcock became ill after baptizing her 1502nd convert and died.⁵⁰ The report stated that those who knew her, "esteemed her highly for her strong intellect, clear presentation of the Scriptures, and effective appeal on behalf of Christ."⁵¹ Mrs. Babcock was a powerful woman with great confidence in her abilities as a minister. The reader may want to refer again to Chapter 2 and review Mrs. Babcock's report of her ministry.

Fortunately, for Disciples women of today and for the whole church, we have documentation of Mrs. Babcock's ministry and some details of her life. Other women were involved in similar ministries in this period, according to state histories. Records could probably be found in local church histories as well. Lester G. McAllister, in a history on Arkansas Disciples, mentioned Sadie McCoy Crank, a peer and colleague of Mrs. Babcock, from Illinois. Sadie McCoy Crank was ordained in 1892, after she had been preaching for two years. She visited Arkansas in 1893 to evangelize at Harrisburg and Paragould. Crank later served as State Evangelist for the Illinois Missionary Society.⁵²

A sampling from the Year Book of the American Christian Missionary Society in 1911 and 1913, further documents the presence of women in ministerial leadership. The Year Book of 1911 listed "Women Preachers"

⁵⁰ B. H. Cleaver, "Mrs. C.C. Babcock, [obituary]," Christian-Evangelist, 31 Dec. 1925: 1703.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Lester G. McAllister, Arkansas Disciples, (N.p. n.p.: 1984), 99. In this recent state history the author does a fine job of including women in a wide range of leadership roles and valuing their contributions to the Disciples movement in that state.

separately, yielding 70 names of women nationwide.⁵³ In 1913, women preachers were listed with the men. There were 64 women on the list.⁵⁴ Of these 64 women, 11 were listed as pastors with congregations ranging from 44 to 250 members.⁵⁵ Women were serving as local pastors of churches in Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, and Oklahoma.⁵⁶

In 1892, Mrs. Persis L. Christian, C.W.B.M. leader and the first woman known to have addressed an Arkansas Convention of Disciples, applauded women ministers in the Christian Standard. She wrote that "while conferences and divines have been trying to decide whether women shall be allowed to preach or not, seven hundred and twenty two of them in the United States (up to 1890) have settled the matter for themselves. . . ."⁵⁷ She optimistically urged women to prepare for the future because freedom for women was coming!⁵⁸

While women of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions were creating new opportunities for women in leadership and women were entering established areas of pastoral ministry, Disciples were still debating which leadership roles women could fill in the local church. David C. Nation, a Disciples pastor and husband of the colorful temperance leader, Carrie

⁵³ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Year Book (Cincinnati: Christian Church, 1911), 128-29. Hereafter reference to this source shall be cited as the Year Book.

⁵⁴ Year Book, 1913, 240-288.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ [Mrs.] Persis L. Christian, "Woman's Interest," Christian Standard, 9 April 1892: 324.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Nation, wrote to the Standard in 1890, adding his piece to the debate. His conclusion from the scriptural evidence was that women could sing, pray, exhort, teach, and even preach.⁵⁹ He drew the line, however, at women having authority over men and determined that men were to govern the church and women were not permitted to usurp authority over men.⁶⁰ One could hardly imagine that Mr. Nation could have denied women the right to preach and be involved in ministry and public life with a wife who made such a colorful contribution to the temperance movement and to women in leadership as she smashed saloons with her trusty axe.

George T. Smith, one of the six persons ordained at Island Park in 1883 with his wife, Josephine, wrote in support of women urging people to judge women's leadership by its fruits.⁶¹ His article showed that women had been exercising leadership in the church. He noted that "we have tried woman's teaching in the Sunday school, in prayer meetings, in the mission fields, and in conventions and have found it good."⁶²

In this period, women's leadership burst into full bloom. Evidence shows that women were involved in mission work, local church ministry, public speaking, and Sunday School. Women were also organizing benevolence work, active in publishing, and in higher education. Marcia M.B. Goodwin, mentioned in Chapter 2, was a prominent Disciples editor and writer in this period and a strong supporter of women's leadership. In 1886,

⁵⁹ David C. Nation, "The Woman Question," Christian Standard, 1 Feb. 1890: 74.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ George T. Smith, "Let the Women Keep Silence in the Churches," Christian Standard, 4 May 1893: 279.

⁶² Ibid.

Mrs. Matilda Younkin, Mrs. James H. Garrison, and Mrs. H.M. Meier founded the National Benevolent Association to further the work of ministry and service to widows, orphans, and others not served by home mission work.⁶³ W.T. Moore, writing in 1909, mentions three women serving as presidents of women's colleges: Mrs. W.T. Moore, Christian College, Missouri; Mrs. O.A. Carr, Carr-Burdette College, Sherman, Texas; and Mrs. Luella St. Clair, Hamilton College, Lexington, Kentucky.⁶⁴

The years between 1909 and 1919 witnessed an important development in the structure of the Disciples of Christ. During these years, the Committee on Cooperation and Unification laid the groundwork for the creation of the United Christian Missionary Society (U.C.M.S.).⁶⁵ This organization brought together the work of six separate organizations: The American Christian Missionary Society, The Christian Woman's Board of Missions, The Foreign Christian Missionary Society, The Board of Church Extension, The National Benevolent Association, and The Board of Ministerial Relief. The Christian Woman's Board of Missions brought into the U.C.M.S. not only its leadership and experience, but also its assets which accounted for 53% of the total assets of the new Society.⁶⁶

Between 1874 and 1920, Disciples women blossomed in their leadership. The story grew as the opportunities developed. From a question of woman's place and the ensuing debate and controversy, women found significant avenues of leadership and service. Women's leadership appeared

⁶³ McAllister and Tucker, 272.

⁶⁴ Moore, 684.

⁶⁵ Lair, 149.

⁶⁶ Lollis, 102.

to be in full bloom, and they were now ready to enter into the life and work of the whole church. Yet, in this merger, we find both ground gained and ground lost for women's leadership. At full flower, the leadership of women began a long, slow process of withering.

Withering (1920 -- Present)

This period covers an almost unmanageable section of time. How does one summarize a time period which includes recovery as a nation from the first World War, the enfranchisement of women, the crash of the stock market and the resulting Great Depression, World War II, military involvement in Korea and Vietnam, the assassination of a president, men walking on the moon, women in space, and an actor in the White House? During this time, Disciples of Christ continued a process of growth and development as they moved from being a "brotherhood" or religious movement and began to grow more intentionally into their identity as a denomination.

Discussions toward uniting the various boards and societies began with the establishment of a calendar committee, in 1906, whose task was to manage the rather large number of special giving days which supported the various societies' work and burdened the local churches.⁶⁷ The committee suggested that the boards and societies unite into one organization under one administrative body.⁶⁸ This suggestion was not acted upon until 1917, when a committee composed of representatives from the boards and societies began a series of meetings to discuss and plan for a united organization.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ McAllister and Tucker, 345.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

The proposal from the committee to form a cooperative organization called the United Christian Missionary Society, was approved by the International Convention meeting in Cincinnati in 1919, and the U.C.M.S. began its official life in 1920.⁷⁰

At the time of the creation of the United Christian Missionary Society in 1920, women were well established as leaders of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions and recognized by the Disciples movement for the quality and scope of their work. While women gave up their autonomy and leadership positions at all levels of their separate organization with this merger, the women of the C.W.B.M. held out for concessions that were not made in similar mergers in other Protestant denominations.

Article IX of the constitution of the U.C.M.S. stated:

There shall be an equal number of men and women on the Board of Managers and Executive Committee. Men and women are eligible to any office of the Society, and all officers, so far as possible, shall be equally distributed between men and women.⁷¹

Ida Withers Harrison, leader in the Christian Woman's Board of Missions and author of a history celebrating 40 years of C.W.B.M.'s work, observed:

It is notable in this new order of things women had equal representation with men; the Board of Managers was composed of sixty men and sixty women, and the Executive Committee of twenty members which it elected, had ten men and ten women on it. It is said that the Disciples of Christ is the first of the great communions to grant its women such generous

⁷⁰ Ibid., 345 and 348.

⁷¹ Year Book, 1920, 13.

representation -- it is a pioneer in giving women equal suffrage in the highest councils of the church.⁷²

A president and two vice-presidents were to serve as officers for the United Christian Missionary Society. The first slate of officers were: President, F.W. Burnham (American Christian Missionary Society), 1st Vice-President, Archibald McLean (Foreign Christian Missionary Society), and 2nd Vice-President, Mrs. Anna Atwater (Christian Woman's Board of Missions).⁷³

Between 1920 and 1968, the United Christian Missionary Society was an organization with a fluid structure. As one traces its ministry and leadership through the Year Book reports, it is evident that the structure was adapted in response to growing and changing needs for ministry.

While women were given equal representation on the Board of Managers and the Executive Committee and always held a vice-presidency in the United Christian Missionary Society, they did not hold many positions at the highest levels of leadership in the departments and divisions of the organization. In 1921, two of eight departments were chaired by women; Foreign Missions and Missionary Education.⁷⁴ The next five years showed women serving in a few top level positions, with most in secondary and lower positions.

Until 1934, the picture remained the same. Two departments, Missionary Education and Home Missions, were chaired by women.⁷⁵ A reorganization took place in that year creating four divisions under which

⁷² Harrison, 158.

⁷³ Year Book, 1920, 13.

⁷⁴ Year Book, 1921, 16.

⁷⁵ Year Book, 1934, 100-101.

there were several departments. None of the four divisions were headed by a women.⁷⁶ A few departments listed under the divisions were administered by women.⁷⁷ This meant that women were serving as leaders primarily in secondary administrative and program areas.

From 1934 to 1957, there were few gains for women. In 1957, another change in organization occurred. Three divisions were formed, all of which were under the guidance of males. Mae Yoho Ward served as the Vice-Chair of the Division of World Missions.⁷⁸ As in the preceding years, women continued to serve in secondary leadership positions.

In 1964, Mae Yoho Ward became the first woman to chair a division. She moved into the Chairpersonship of the Division of World Missions and remained in that post until 1967.⁷⁹ In the remaining years of the United Christian Missionary Society, no other division had a female executive.

In the late 1950's and early 1960's Disciples looked once again at their structures for carrying out the mission and ministry of the church at the national and international levels. Meeting at Louisville in 1960, the International Convention approved the formation of a Commission on Restructure.⁸⁰ The Provisional Design For the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was approved almost unanimously at the International Convention, meeting at Kansas City in 1968.⁸¹ The Disciples of Christ were no longer a

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Year Book, 1957, 183-84.

⁷⁹ Year Book, 1964, 207.

⁸⁰ McAllister and Tucker, 434.

⁸¹ Ibid., 442.

"movement of individuals, congregations, and agencies working together in an annual convention," they were on their way to becoming a church.⁸²

During the period of restructure, while Disciples were busy becoming a church, women continued to lose ground in the top levels of leadership. As the 1970s unfolded, no women occupied the highest level of professional leadership roles in general church work, with the exception of the head of the Department of Church Women, Fran Craddock, Vice President of the Division of Homeland Ministries.⁸³ In 1976, Jean Woolfolk became the President of the Church Finance Council, one of the units of the restructured church, and was the first woman to head a division or unit of the general church following the restructure process. She served in this position until her retirement in 1982. Jean Woolfolk, a lay person from Arkansas, was also the first woman to serve as moderator of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).⁸⁴ The moderator is the highest elected leadership position in the Disciples church.

With the merger of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions with the United Christian Missionary Society, women gained important concessions but also lost ground. In the C.W.B.M., women served at all levels of professional leadership, including the highest executive levels. In the U.C.M.S., they did not achieve the same level of professional executive leadership. However, the foresight of C.W.B.M. leaders assured formal

⁸² Ibid., 443.

⁸³ Year Book, 1976, 31.

⁸⁴ McAllister and Tucker, 451.

female leadership on the policy-making bodies, and in the professional ministry of U.C.M.S.

Women continued to find positions as local church pastors in this period. Jessie C. Monser wrote to the Christian-Evangelist in 1931 regarding women in ministry. She observed that the doors of the church were still closed to the full participation of women in ministry and that women experienced opposition to their ministry, were given employment in remote churches, and received meager salaries.⁸⁵ Monser noted that there were about 1600 women preachers in the United States; of these, about 365 Disciples women served in a variety of positions.⁸⁶ She reported the personal stories of several women, including one who wrote:

Of course one must take the small run-down has-been churches. I have one going that has been closed 10 years. Found a peck of nuts in the piano. Squirrels had used it for an elevator. But the piano is in good shape; have 95 in the Sunday School and we are a going concern.⁸⁷

In this period of withering, women continued to serve as ministers. Disciples periodicals no longer carried articles and letters debating women's right to preach. These resources indicate the controversy no longer demanded the same degree of attention for Disciples as was the case in earlier years.

Several articles printed in the Christian-Evangelist in 1934 raised a question about women's leadership: women's role in the decision making

⁸⁵ Jessie C. Monser, "Women in the Ministry," Christian-Evangelist, 19 Nov. 1931: 1526-27.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 1526.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 1531.

structures of the local church. Like Lela Taylor, mentioned in Chapter 2, Ora Shepherd, in an address to the 1934 International Convention of Disciples of Christ, expressed her deep concern about woman's place in the church. She noted that women between the ages of 25 and 40 were not well represented in the church and attributed this to the lack of leadership opportunities for women at the local level.⁸⁸ She charged the church with being the "last stronghold of conservatism" as regarded women in leadership.⁸⁹ She believed that younger women had left the church to serve in other organizations where they had greater influence and opportunity for leadership.⁹⁰ In the last years of the nineteenth century, David Nation and other writers held that women should not usurp authority over men; this widely held thought persisted in the local church where women were not included on decision making bodies.

In the late 1940's and early 1950's, interest stirred once more in the church regarding the place of women. The World Council of Churches issued a report on women in church life in 1949 which encouraged churches to review the status of women.⁹¹ The Disciples response to this invitation was published in 1953. Entitled, Women in the Church: A Symposium on the Service and Status of Women among the Disciples of Christ, this report contained several articles which explored the historical, Biblical, practical, and social aspects of women in the church at that point in history.

⁸⁸ Ora L. Shepherd, "Greater Things Than These," Christian-Evangelist, 15 Nov. 1934: 1471-72.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Lollis, 124.

Howard E. Short included in his essay a report written by representative women of the Disciples of Christ. This powerful statement called for the broad inclusion of women in leadership at all levels of church life. This group sought full leadership opportunities for women in the local church, including the ordained ministry, the offices of elder and deacon, membership on church boards, and consideration for church and committee offices.⁹² At the state level, while indicating a desire to cooperate with other state leaders and boards, the report commented that "until women are accorded full membership, we believe our best work can be done through complete autonomy of women's work."⁹³ This report also called for adequate representation on policy making boards or committees at district, state, and national levels, adequate representation on convention planning committees and on the program as speakers, and equal pay for equal responsibilities.⁹⁴ Thirty-five years later, this report sounds all too familiar and still remains a challenge for the church.

At the same time that interest was stirring on the status of women in the church, Jessie Trout, Vice-President of the U.C.M.S., turned her attention to the disarray of women's organizations in the local church.⁹⁵ With the end of Christian Woman's Board of Missions as a separate entity, there was a decline in the membership and giving levels of the local women's missionary

⁹² Howard E. Short, "The Service and Status of Women Among the Disciples of Christ: Report of the National Committee," Women in the Church: A Symposium on the Service and Status of Women Among the Disciples of Christ (Lexington, Ky.: College of the Bible, 1953) 25.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 25-26.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 134.

auxiliaries. Concurrently, women's councils were appearing in local churches. These two organizations had different structures and concerns and competed for women's loyalty and dollars. In 1949, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the C.W.B.M., 75 women gathered to address the need for a unified women's organization in the Disciples of Christ church.⁹⁶ The Christian Women's Fellowship emerged from this consultation and its design included 3 areas of work for all the women of the church: worship, study, and service.⁹⁷

Coincidental to the reemergence of the women's movement in the 1960s, Disciples took a look at women in professional ministerial leadership. There had been a marked decline in the number of Disciples women serving in the professional ministry.⁹⁸ As more women entered seminary and sought placement, this trend began to change, and Disciples once again had to face the question of women's leadership in ministry. Anna Jarvis-Parker, in an article examining Disciples clergywomen in the late 1970s and early 1980s, presented statistics on women in ministry. As of 1984, 112 Disciples women served as pastors (4.2% of the total Disciples pastors), and 120 as associate ministers (32.8% of Disciples associates). There were 819 Disciples women in ministry, including retired women and student ministers (11.8% of the total Disciples clergy), and there were 595 ordained women (9.8% of the total ordained Disciples clergy).⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Lollis, 149.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 144.

⁹⁸ Anna R. Jarvis-Parker, "The Situation and Trends in the Ministry of Disciple Clergywomen in the Last Seven Years," *Discipliana* 45, no. 1 (1985): 7-9.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 8.

"Full opportunity for ministerial service for women has not yet come into being even among the Disciples," read the report in 1953.¹⁰⁰ In 1984, over one-third of seminarians were women.¹⁰¹ As the seminary enrollment of women increases and as they graduate, the stories of professional female ministerial leadership are being written. The general, regional, and local church are asked to participate in creating a story of women in ministry. For example, a powerful story of women in ministry became a story told nationwide in June 1987, when Gayle Schoepf and her daughter Elaine Schoepf, were ordained in a joint service of worship. Records indicate that Gayle and Elaine Schoepf are the first mother and daughter to be ordained in this fashion.

A brief look at our present situation shows women serving at many levels of professional, formal, and denominational leadership in the church. At the local level, women serve in many churches on the policy-making bodies and in lay leadership as elders and members of the diaconate. The statistics are not available here to show the percentage of churches which still do not elect women to lay leadership as elders, deacons, and church officers. Some Disciples churches do fit this category, and some churches have only recently elected women as elders. Women are represented on regional boards and the General Board of the church. Women have not achieved the highest level of executive leadership at the general level, with the notable exceptions of Jean Woolfolk and, prior to restructure, Mae Yoho Ward. Women are represented at the second level of leadership however, including: Ann Updegraff-Spleth and Fran Craddock, Vice-Presidents of the

¹⁰⁰ Short, 31

¹⁰¹ Jarvis-Parker, 9.

Division of Homeland Ministries; Julia Marie Brown, Vice-President of the Division of Overseas Ministries; and Claudia Grant, Deputy General Minister and President.¹⁰² As of 1987, one woman, Peggy Owen Clark, held the position of Regional Minister, in the Pacific Southwest Region; one of thirty-five regional ministers and the first woman to serve in this senior position.

I have described this period as a time of withering for women in leadership, as contrasted to the high levels of formal and professional leadership women attained during the period of the C.W.B.M. In the C.W.B.M.'s 45 year history, women proved themselves capable of providing quality leadership at all levels of administration. Women also served as local church pastors and others held positions in state and national work. While some gains have been made in recent years, women are still not well represented in either professional or elected leadership in the general, regional or local church. In the nearly 140 years that Disciples have had a national body to meet, hear reports, and vote on issues of concern, only two women have served in the highest elected office: Jean Woolfolk, and Joy Greer both of them fine lay leaders. Church leaders have been unable to identify and select an ordained woman to serve in this position in the one hundred years Disciples have ordained women.

While there are signs of withering, this "plant" is not dying. Women have maintained a presence in leadership during this period and still serve the church in significant ways. Signs of growth can be seen as women continue their story of leadership. An important task for women and the church is to recover the story of Disciples women leaders, to use the story as

¹⁰² Year Book, 1987, 23, 26, and 9.

a resource for challenging the structures that limit women at each level of church, and to identify new directions for ministry.

Conclusions and Challenges of the Story

Disciples women have a story. Born out of controversy, strengthened in their purpose by faith and sensing their call to the ministry of Jesus Christ, women created and filled leadership roles. These two chapters paint the story in broad strokes and establish the fact that women have a story. This story is not only important for women as a resource, but also important to help the church recognize women and reevaluate the larger Disciple story in order to understand women's contributions more fully.

The general Disciples histories, written by Moore (1909), Garrison and DeGroot (1948), and McAllister and Tucker (1975), do not give adequate attention to women's leadership. None of the three give consideration to the controversy over the woman question that occupied so much attention in the last half of the nineteenth century. The large body of articles and letters found in the Christian Standard and the Christian-Evangelist support the claim that the woman question was an important issue in the movement.

The story of women is an invaluable resource in arriving at our present understanding of women's leadership. This story is vitally important for today's Disciples women, both lay and clergy, in developing a meaningful philosophy surrounding woman's place in the church. Our foremothers of faith laid the foundation for women's leadership. The next step is to reflect on the power of the story and the potential power in telling it.

CHAPTER 4

The Significance of Telling Women's Story as Empowerment for Leadership

Introduction

What is the importance of telling the story? What power is found in recovering the story of Disciples women in leadership? What significance does this story have for Disciples women today? In what ways does telling the story influence the church today?

The theological rationale for recovering and telling the story of Disciples women in leadership is based on the presupposition that stories and the act of storytelling is a vital and powerful activity in human life for shaping identity, forming faith, and developing ministry and leadership in response to faith. Story is more than a creative or quaint way to articulate experience. Telling and hearing stories is a basic human need and task. Stories appeal to the deep human need to bring order out of chaos and to experience life as coherent and meaningful. Telling stories is one way of answering the deepest questions of meaning. Stories address questions such as "Who am I?"; "How do I live in the world?"; "What experiences give shape to my identity?"; "Who am I in relationship to others?"; "Who am I in relationship to God?"; and other questions that arise out of the experience of being human. John Navone, theologian, expressed the importance of story for human beings in this way:

Without stories there is no knowledge of the world, of ourselves, of others, and of God. Our narrative consciousness is our power

for comprehending ourselves in our coherence with the world and other selves; it expresses our existential reality as storytelling and storylistening animals, acting and reacting within our particular world context, overcoming the incoherence of the unexamined life. . . . We live on stories; we shape our lives through stories. . . .¹

Telling stories is a powerful act which gives shape and meaning to human lives. Stories empower persons by offering a means by which identity and experience are named and ordered. Stories provide occasions for transforming and challenging individuals and the faith community. Recovering women's stories is an important task for women and for the church. These accounts provide a resource for individual and collective empowerment which can call forth a deeper faith and commitment to ministry and service.

In Chapter 4, the first section will explore the theology of story as a perspective that affirms the significance of telling stories and will further define the four functions of story identified above: 1) naming, 2) ordering, 3) challenging, 4) transforming. The second and third sections will present the Disciples women's stories told in Chapters 2 and 3, as resources which enable women's leadership and offer a challenge to the church. The final section of Chapter 4 will conclude with suggestions for the kind of stories and storytelling that Disciples need today.

Power of Stories and Storytelling

The approach to theology identified as theology of story or narrative theology affirms the value found in story and in the act of storytelling as a resource for theological reflection on matters of faith, identity, and ministry. Peter Morgan, a Disciples leader and educator, wrote a book on stories as a

¹ John Navone, Toward a Theology of Story (Slough, England: St. Paul Publications, 1977), 18.

means of transforming the congregation. He stated that the stories persons tell and retell have power in their lives.² Stories serve as a lens through which to view life and come to understanding.³ The collection of story resources for the Christian community is vast, including those found in the Old Testament and New Testament, the accounts of the saints throughout the history of Christianity, and the living stories of persons today. This listing does not exhaust the possibilities, which would also include poetry, fairy tales, fiction, myth, and the stories of other faith communities. This project focuses specifically on the historical accounts of women in the Disciples of Christ as one resource from the library of stories that engage human beings.

The Power of Story

The primary resources used in this chapter for examining the power of stories and storytelling are the work of William J. Bausch, Storytelling: Imagination and Faith; John Dominic Crossan, The Dark Interval: Toward A Theology of Story; and Sallie McFague, Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language. Bausch's work explores the value of story as an approach to the theological task. Crossan's work provides a framework by which to identify the characteristics of the stories of Disciples women. McFague's work offers a framework to critique the larger story of the Disciples of Christ and its exclusion of women's stories and points to the problems and dangers of a limited and inaccurate story.

William Bausch, a parish priest and theologian, in Storytelling: Imagination and Faith, supported his emphasis on the value of story for the

² Peter Morgan, Story Weaving: Using Stories to Transform Your Congregation (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1986), 7.

³ Ibid.

theological task, in the very structure of his book. The book includes nearly one hundred anecdotes and stories which he understood as being the text, all the rest being commentary.⁴ He understood theology of story, or narrative theology, as a way of reclaiming the importance of story's power to articulate human experience. This approach challenged what Bausch considered to be an overemphasis on systematic theology. Storytelling, the recounting of human stories in relationship to God's story, is the original experience, the raw data of theology.⁵ Systematic theology is reflection on the story, an "intellectual sorting out of the experiences in order to talk about them philosophically."⁶ Systematic theology, according to Bausch, appropriately reflects on the ultimate mysteries revealed in story and provides a way to draw meaning and understanding, but "it is the story that carries power, that asks, 'What do you think?' or better, 'How does it move you?' ".⁷

Story carries power. Story enables us to "revisit an old situation in a new way."⁸ Storytelling is the place where faith began. In retelling stories, like the Jesus story, persons create an occasion to sense Christ's presence again.⁹ Recovering the stories of Disciples women provides a resource, and telling them offers an occasion to benefit from the story's power. Hearing the accounts of these past women's lives creates an opportunity to sense

⁴ William J. Bausch, Storytelling: Imagination and Faith (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Pub., 1984), 13.

⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁹ Ibid., 22.

their presence and invite their stories to enter the hearer's lives and engage them in raising questions of faith and practice of ministry.

Bausch identified thirteen characteristics of a good story, two of which elaborate on the powerful nature of story to touch human lives and shape human experience. These characteristics point to the value of the story of Disciples women as a resource. Bausch's third characteristic is: "stories are a bridge to one's culture, one's roots."¹⁰ Bausch observed that people, nations, communities and families have stories and myths that give them identity.¹¹ As an example, he noted that when a nation is in trouble, "it often returns to its traditional stories to look for direction and healing, to regain a sense of what made it great in the past and what will nurture it into the future."¹² Without stories, individuals and communities live with amnesia, cease to exist, and lose their souls.¹³ In light of his observations, the story's power is evident. Disciples women of today need the stories of women past to shape their identities and experiences, deepen their faith, and identify opportunities for expanding leadership and ministry. It is essential for the Disciples of Christ to adopt this story in order to establish a more honest identity and be enabled in the task of incorporating the gifted leadership of women in the present and the future.

¹⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Bausch's fifth characteristic is: "stories help us to remember."¹⁴ Looking to our past, our history gives us occasion to remember both our moments of "glory and shame."¹⁵ We tell our stories of past shame that in remembering and confessing we might be made whole.¹⁶ The story of Disciples women in the past challenges the church to identify its accomplishments which enabled women's leadership. Another task is to remember and acknowledge the moments of shame, when women have been excluded, rather than valued, and when the church has rejected the valuable gifts that women offered.

Story functions in human lives in dynamic ways. Telling our individual life stories and the accounts of the past, empowers us to continue working at identity, faith, and ministry by juxtaposing the present against the past. These characteristics of story, identified by Bausch do not completely exhaust the possible ways stories empower human lives. They do point to ways in which the particular historical accounts influence individuals and the faith community in powerful ways.

Moving from the experience of story in human lives, a look now to Crossan's work will explore a framework for identifying characteristics or modes of story. By examining the way story works, one can more fully understand its dynamic qualities. For Crossan, story does more than describe the world; it creates the world.¹⁷ Crossan identified five modes of

¹⁴ Ibid., 36.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John Dominic Crossan, The Dark Interval: Toward a Theology of Story (Niles, Ill.: Argus Communications, 1975), 9.

modes of story based on the relationship between story and world: (1) story establishes world in myth; (2) story defends the established world in apologue; (3) story discusses and describes the world in action; (4.) story attacks the world in satire; and (5) story subverts the world in parable. Myth, apologue, action, satire, and parable are types of story.¹⁸

Myth and parable, as two poles of story, provide a lens through which to view the story of Disciples women in relation to the larger history of the church. A simple way to state how these two poles of story function is to say that myth forms the world and parable transforms the world.¹⁹ The way that humans order and understand the world, in a world view, is mythic. As we create an orderly world and put things in their places in order to understand relationships and create a sense of harmony, we are forming the myth by which we live.

The story of the Disciples of Christ with its limited attention to the stories of women is mythic. The content of Disciples history as it now stands, forms a world view that values men and their leadership in shaping the movement's history. At the same time, this version of the story forms a world view that supports an understanding of women as subordinate to men, functioning primarily as helpers or as leaders in the more acceptable areas of leadership and ministry, relating to mission, education, benevolence, and later, women's work with women.

Finally, this world view is one in which women found it necessary to create separate structures, such as the Christian Woman's Board of Missions,

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ For this notion and wording I am indebted to Mary Elizabeth Moore, Professor of Christian Education and Theology, School of Theology at Claremont, who articulated this understanding in a conversation on Feb. 9, 1988.

to exercise their leadership. This myth affirmed women's leadership in restricted roles. The myth that formed the dominant world view of Disciples of Christ in its regard for women did retain some record of women's work. One wonders how much of women's story has been lost or ignored in the course of Disciples history as unimportant or inconsistent with the myth. Disciples can affirm the story of women, even as it exists now in the historical accounts, as an important part of shaping the myth which created the church.

Parable transforms or subverts the world. Crossan pointed out that parable can only subvert the world created in and by myth. It is possible to live in myth, without parable; it is not possible to live in parable alone.²⁰ The story of women's leadership told in Chapters 2 and 3 functions as parable in relation to the mythic story of the Disciples of Christ; it subverts the mythic understanding of women and their roles. The myth that women were fulfilling leadership roles that did not radically question the cult of domesticity was challenged by the stories of women who did exercise leadership in nontraditional ways. Ministers such as Clara Babcock, Marcia Goodwin as writer and editor, and the women who administered and built a powerful missionary organization, tell parabolic stories that confront the myth. These stories challenge the world established by myth, break into the established order of the Disciples of Christ, and confront it with powerful women in leadership roles. An ordained woman pastor was not a part of the created order of the Disciples of Christ in the nineteenth century. In the work of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions, women were serving in an acceptable area of missions; yet what they were doing was parabolic; they

²⁰ Crossan, 60.

were administrators, public speakers, world travelers, organizers, fund raisers, and decision makers. Their work in the story of the Disciples of Christ is often pointed to as the primary place where women contributed to the larger story and the most acceptable in the mythic world view of the church and women. Another look at that story, viewed as parable, changes the way it functions and offers an important challenge to the myth of the Disciples of Christ.

Both myth and parable are important. Human beings must order, establish, and create their world in a way that makes it congruent and enables persons to live meaningfully. Myth affirms and builds; yet myth without parable is dangerous. When a world view becomes rigid and closed, there is no room for growth and change, and the story cannot be expanded. The story loses its power and meaning for a wide range of persons and experiences when the world view of the myth becomes established as the only view, with no openness to new or different stories and interpretations. The stories of Disciples women in leadership told in Chapters 2 and 3 offer a parable to interact with and shake up the mythic story of the Disciples of Christ as it now reads in historical resources and as we live it in the present. This is a dynamic occasion for change and transformation in how Disciples of Christ understand women's leadership and their contributions to the church.

There is an inherent danger when one world view is established to the exclusion of others. Sallie McFague's work underlies this understanding and expands this concern. Speaking of religious language, McFague pointed out that it becomes idolatrous when it absolutizes one tradition, and it becomes irrelevant when it excludes the experiences of a variety of people.²¹

²¹ Sallie McFague, Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 3.

An example of how idolatry occurs in religious language is drawn from conservative religious movements which argue, for instance, that the Bible is the word of God. The need to establish the truth is a way of dealing with the fear of relativism and plurality.²² The same thing happens when a mythic story, with one world view, is established. The story as myth, when it excludes women or distorts their story to meet the criteria for acceptable women's leadership, is in danger of becoming idolatrous. The story can become idolatrous when it attempts to absolutize an understanding of women as capable of fulfilling leadership and ministry in primarily supportive and informal leadership roles, while establishing the broader leadership context as the domain of males. An example of how this idolatry works in practice would be the difficulty that women ministers have today in the placement process. There are churches in the denomination who will not consider a woman because their absolutized and idolatrous tradition for ministry is male.

McFague's second concern, irrelevant language, is a result of continuous usage to the point that the language becomes boring and repetitious and people become indifferent to it.²³ Even more important for McFague, regarding the issue of irrelevance, is that language becomes meaningless when it excludes people in specific ways.²⁴ A group for whom this is particularly true is women. Feminist scholars claim that "whoever names the world owns the world."²⁵ Until women can participate in naming

²² Ibid., 4.

²³ Ibid., 8.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

the world of Western religion, that world is not theirs.²⁶ A related problem is the patriarchal character of Western religious language which incorporates male images for God, as well as for patterns of relationship in the nation, the church, and the family.²⁷

The characteristics of irrelevant language apply also to story. The broader story of the Disciples of Christ, as told at this point in history, is irrelevant for women as it repeatedly lifts up the white male story and repeats the same stories of women in supportive and narrowly defined roles. The power in recovering the story of women in leadership in the Disciples movement is in making the story more relevant to women by identifying their contributions in the larger story. In order to be a part of the naming of religious experience and ministry, it is important for women to be involved in recovering, telling, and hearing their stories of leadership.

Gathering the threads of these scholars' work points to important reasons to argue that storytelling is powerful and significant. Stories have the capacity to impact human lives. Stories establish our world view, and stories can change that world view by offering challenges and questions. Finally, stories, when they are flexible and relevant for a variety of persons' experiences, offer the possibility for transformation of individuals and the church.

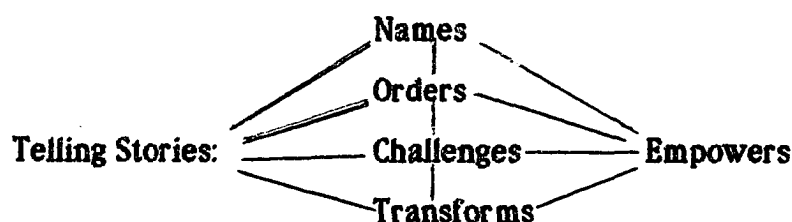
How Story Empowers

The purpose of this project is to recover and tell a portion of the story of Disciples women in leadership. Informing that purpose is the

²⁶ Ibid., 9.

²⁷ Ibid.

understanding that story is important. Story empowers persons by imparting authority to their experience. Research in both theology and history have pointed to a model that is instructive for viewing this dynamic aspect of story. Story empowers individuals and the faith community by providing occasions for naming, ordering, challenging, and transforming individual lives and collective lives. A model for this assertion would look like this:



These four functions of story -- naming, ordering, challenging, transforming-- are not meant to exhaust the ways story empowers persons, but rather to identify key ways that the story of Disciples women empowers. When we engage in telling stories, we engage in naming, ordering, challenging, and transforming. When even one or more of these experiences takes place, empowerment can occur.

The sequence of these four functions of story are not listed in order of importance. They can happen individually, collectively, or in any combination and sequence. The functions of naming and ordering seem to be related to Crossan's understanding of myth. These two experiences of story establish and order the world. The functions of challenging and transforming are related to Crossan's understanding of parable. These two experiences of story ask questions, confront, disestablish the accepted world view and open individuals and the faith community to the possibility of

change. In this section, these functions of story for empowering at the personal and collective level will be defined.

Stories empower by naming. This function of story addresses the question "Who am I?" Human beings spend their lives seeking to establish a coherent, meaningful, integrated identity. The act of living one's life is a continuous process of naming. We start with a name, a given name and a last name or surname, that relates us to a particular family. We build an identity to go along with the life that is lived with that name. Naming is a powerful act. In ancient times, to share one's name was to give power to the one gifted with your name. By sharing a name with humanity in the story of the Hebrew Bible, God was entering into relationship with humanity. Exchanging names is a first act between strangers to establish a relationship.

Naming extends from establishing personal identity and relationships into a process of identifying experiences and feelings. When we tell stories; our own and others, the accounts often include naming facets of the experience. We identify how we felt and what we thought as we experience an event.

The stories of Disciples women in leadership provides women today with the names of the foremothers of faith. The story identifies the events and activities in their lives and names their leadership. These stories name woman as leader. Stories of the past give women of today a resource to name themselves as leaders and to hear stories that help articulate their identities.

Stories empower by ordering. The function of ordering addresses the question "What shall I do and how?" Human beings need and seek order. The creation of families, communities, states, and nations, is an attempt to establish an order for human relationships. Ordering is a means of

understanding relationships and creating a structure that defines and enables meaningful activity. Ordering holds back chaos, confusion, and meaninglessness; it eases the tremendous anxiety of being human and existing. Persons write from left to right in sentences and paragraphs to bring order to their written thoughts. Organizations are established to provide order and process and enable meaningful and consistent work. Creating order is a way to affirm and establish a world view.

The story of Disciples women in leadership places women in the broader framework of the movement and establishes the relationship between women and the church. The story of women illustrates their place in the order of leadership and ministry, as well as their role in creating new initiatives and forms of ministry in the church.

Stories empower by challenging. Not all stories are comfortable, nor do they end with "they all lived happily everafter." This function of challenging addresses the question of identity with a different focus; "Who am I now?" Stories challenge us as we relate our lives to other stories and find the places of inconsistency and incongruity. Stories challenge persons when they identify experiences and thoughts that are new or different and that call them to move beyond their present understanding to, . . . who knows? When stories challenge, they upset; they raise questions about identity and order and they leave persons open to new ways of understanding themselves and their relationships.

The story of Disciples women offers challenge to women and the church. These women did powerful and extraordinary acts in the context of their time. They challenged the church and one another as they moved into leadership. The questions they raised for the mythic story still confront us as individuals and the church when we look to see how women serve in

leadership today. Their story questioned the order of patriarchal society by breaking stereotypes and moving into new and expanded leadership roles.

Stories empower by transforming. The function of transforming addresses the question "What shall I do now?" Like the function of ordering, transforming asks a question about meaningful activity. Transformation takes place when humans begin the process of resolving challenge by changing, that is, by seeking new order. Transformation is both active and passive. We can initiate transformation as a disciplined process, and we can experience transformation in more immediate and powerful ways.

Women's stories of leadership invite women to change or transform their lives to be more faithful and more deeply committed to and involved in ministry and leadership. This process of empowering for change is not simple. Transforming self does not necessarily mean that the church will embrace empowered women and accept their gifts for leadership in ways that will fully serve the church's ministry or fully affirm those gifts. A part of the power of story lies in creating transformed powerful women who will challenge the church. Their stories may then invite and at times demand, transformation of the identity and order of the church to be more inclusive of women in leadership.

An Analysis of Particular Women's Stories

Women need stories of women as a resource for empowerment. In a patriarchal culture which values men while devaluing women, storytelling takes on a new urgency for women. Women have lived without an adequate telling of their stories in the story of humanity and in the more specific story of the Disciples of Christ. Carol P Christ, in Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest, argued for the importance of women's need to hear their stories in the work of women writers. Her work deals

more specifically with prose and poetry, but it applies to the importance of women's stories of the past as well. Carol Christ articulated the experience of women without their stories in this way:

Women's stories have not been told. And without stories there is no articulation of experience. Without stories, a woman is lost when she comes to make the important decisions of her life. She does not learn to value her struggles, to celebrate her strengths, to comprehend her pain. Without stories she cannot understand herself. Without stories she is alienated from those deeper experiences of self and world that have been called spiritual or religious. She is closed in silence. The expression of women's spiritual quest is integrally related to the telling of women's stories. If women's stories are not told, the depth of women's souls will not be known.²⁸

Recovering, telling, and hearing women's story of leadership is a crucial task for Disciples women today for naming themselves as leaders and understanding more fully their experience as women in leadership.

Reviewing Disciples history for the purpose of finding stories of women in leadership creates a resource for women to name themselves, and in the naming, be empowered for leadership. This section will now examine several stories of particular women in leadership referring to the model above and identifying the power of these stories to name, order, challenge and transform.

Clara C.H. Babcock was empowered by her faith and the Biblical story that affirmed her as a daughter of God and a follower of Christ called to serve as a minister. Clara's story is powerful when viewed in the context of the nineteenth century, when women were told that ministry was not a woman's place. Clara confronted the oppression of the nineteenth century

²⁸ Carol P. Christ, Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest (Boston: Beacon, 1980), 1.

with her faith and her knowledge of scripture. She was confident that she was called to serve as a minister and found scriptural affirmation in the stories of women like Phebe and Priscilla who served with Paul. Babcock did not retreat in the face of men who ridiculed women who seeking to "dress in ministerial garb." She met them on their own ground, using the New Testament as the source of support for her ministry. She was a woman of courage who was transformed by her faith to become not what the patriarchal church and culture wanted her to be, but rather to become what she believed God called her to be. In the nineteenth century, it was nothing short of amazing to find a wife and mother who became a minister and enjoyed the full support of her family in that vocation.

Clara preached and taught, married and buried, baptized, and founded churches! All this in the face of an understanding that women were mentally and physically inferior to men and therefore incapable of performing the grueling tasks of ministry. Clara was a parable who shattered that myth with her life as a minister. Her story names women as ordained ministers serving the people of God in local congregations. Her story, as parable, challenges the church to rethink the male model for ministerial leadership and include women in that role. Her story encourages women to raise questions about their faith and gifts and, when called to Christian service, to be open to the ordained ministry.

Marcia M.B. Goodwin was an editor. In Disciples understanding, she was functioning as a "bishop." While this role was not an official ecclesiastical position in the Disciples movement, it carried influence. She applied her intelligence, wit, and gift for writing to question the myths that women could not serve. Believing passionately that women could and must serve Christ for their sakes and for the sake of the world, she applied her

gifts to challenging the forces that sought to stifle women's full participation in the leadership of the church. In her publishing work, she sought to affirm, support, and empower women for leadership in the church.

Goodwin names women in lay leadership as persons who can influence and invite the church to include women in leadership. Her story names women as writers and as persons with prophetic voices who can challenge the church to recognize the gifts that women bring to ministry and to broaden its understanding of the roles that women can fill.

Carolyn Neville Pearre, minister's wife, and lay woman, answered a call to ministry and leadership by addressing the need to expand the Disciples mission witness. She called on women to address the task of taking the gospel into the world when it appeared that the men could use some resourceful feminine allies in mission work. Starting with faith, a sense of purpose, minimal resources, and concerned women to share the task, this nineteenth century woman and her partners built an organization that provided significant ministry at home and abroad. The Christian Woman's Board of Missions provided the opportunity for women to engage in meaningful leadership and ministry that was denied them in the broader ministries of the church. Carolyn Pearre and her partners in leadership created a story that expresses women's ability to order ministry in effective ways. The story of women in missions identifies women as capable of filling a wide range of leadership roles and significantly shaping the history of the Disciples of Christ as it organized to meet the growing demands of ministry into the twentieth century.

These stories of our foremothers of faith can inspire women to leadership in today's world. If women in the nineteenth century, living with the strong stereotypes of domesticity, could be inspired by the Biblical story,

and break open the church, claiming their leadership, then women today stand challenged even more. Not only do women have the Biblical story, they have the stories of these women who paved the way for the positions of leadership women hold today. Women are now ordained, and even encouraged toward ministry, because Clara and her many unnamed sisters in ministry had the courage and conviction to keep the call of God uppermost in their lives, even in the midst of the church's opposition. Women have served, and serve now, in positions of leadership in the local, regional (state) and general (national) levels of church because of the legacy of Carolyn Pearre and the legion of C.W.B.M. women who illustrated how women could organize for ministry and do so in successful and significant ways. These leaders insured that women would have a place in the decision-making bodies of the U.C.M.S., and that foresight has continued to impact the church's structures today insofar as they are open to women's leadership. Our mothers of faith met the challenge of the church and the world and entered into leadership. Their story is a parable which shattered the myths of the nineteenth century. Their story is also mythic as women today exercise leadership in a variety of ways -- lay and ordained, professional and elected-- as a part of the established order of the church.

An Analysis of Women's Story in the Church's Story

The collection of women's stories that comprise the larger story of women in leadership in the Disciples of Christ, is not only important as individual stories that empower women; the story of women also offers the denomination a resource to challenge and transform, and to name and order the church.

Eleanor L. McLaughlin, in an article on women reclaiming history, spoke to this point. She suggested that the task before women and the

church is to reexamine Christian history "with a new set of questions that arise out of commitments to wholeness for women and for all humanity."²⁹ The task is not to rewrite history, but to reexamine the story and tell more of it.³⁰

The historical research presented in Chapters 2 and 3 tells a part of the story of women in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a story that has not been dealt with adequately in historians' telling of the larger story. This telling of the story of Disciples women is a part of the task of reexamining the larger story of Disciples and arises from an understanding that the story of women is important and that it is a resource needed for individuals as well as the church.

Women have had a vital role in the human story and in the particular story of the Disciples of Christ which has, until more recent years, gone unnoticed. As a result of the feminist movement in the last two decades, women have identified the need for women's story and have turned to the task of recovering the story. Women of the Christian tradition are searching for the story of women across the centuries in the larger story of Christianity and in the more particular story of women in the various churches that make up the Christian community. Telling the accounts of Disciples women in leadership is part of this larger task of returning to the past and seeking the story of women to name the contributions they have made and to challenge the church to reevaluate the roles women have played in the church's story.

²⁹ Eleanor L. McLaughlin, "The Christian Past: Does It Hold a Future for Women?," Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, eds. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 93.

³⁰ Ibid., 96.

As previously noted, women in a patriarchal society, with its emphasis on the power, influence, and importance of males, have lived largely without their story. When we look to the past, we find a story told from the perspective of male leadership and influence. The authors of general histories of the Disciples of Christ have given insufficient attention to women's leadership and contributions to the movement. The church is denied an important resource for evaluating its past and having a more truthful and complete understanding of its story.

The story of women as it stands today is both myth and parable. The story has been used in two ways that hinder women in their quest for leadership: as myth, it tells the story that women have always been ordained and have since the early days of the movement served in leadership. This myth tempts the church to feel comfortable and satisfied with its inclusion of women. Another facet of the story tells the myth that women in leadership are the exception and are not as important in the story as leaders. Though mutually contradicting, these myths still live in the church. Women are ordained and then have difficulty in their first placement, as well as their second moves to larger churches. Women serve in professional leadership at the local, regional, and general levels of the church, yet with few exceptions in secondary administrative roles. Women serve as elected church leaders, again, at each level of church organization. While this is cause for celebration, we must remember that only two women have served in the highest elected position of leadership in the denomination and neither was an ordained woman.

The story, as parable, encourages the church to rethink the story of women and to accept the challenges their story offers and embrace the opportunity to change. This parable urges the church to expand its world

view to include women in the the story, not as separate, or as the exception to the rule; but as equally important in shaping the history.

Telling the Story Today

Women now stand in the present era of the Disciples of Christ as leaders of many areas of ministry and Christian leadership, without an adequate understanding of how they came to this place and who laid the foundations for women's present places of leadership. The church stands in the present era in much the same position. We are challenged to recover the story of women and to reexamine it in relationship to the whole story of our life as a church.

This project serves as one way of telling the story of women by offering the historical research that tells part of Disciples women's story. The story serves as a challenge for the scholars of the church to reexamine the historical resources and seek the story of women and evaluate that story as it relates to the larger story. A related task is to find ways to communicate that story.

Telling the story is an important task in the life of the community today. In addition to recovering the story and evaluating it, we need to tell it in as many ways and settings as we can identify. I have offered workshops and programs that tell these stories and have been empowered in that process. When women gather and hear of these women identified in the project, they have also become excited and, at times, disturbed and challenged in the process of having their stories engaged by the stories of women past.

In one experience, I was presenting this material in a speech to the women's group of a large metropolitan church. There were 90-100 women present, many who had been long time Disciples and active for many years

in the Christian Women's Fellowship of the church. I asked for a show of hands of those who were familiar with the name of Clara Babcock. The response was no surprise -- blank looks and the absence of raised hands. When I asked the same question for Carolyn Pearre, founder of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions and foremother of the Christian Women's Fellowship, it was disconcerting to see no hands raised. These women were unaware of their story. Out of that experience of storytelling, 90-100 women now know who Clara Babcock and Carolyn Pearre are and what they did.

In my experience of designing and leading workshops dealing with women in leadership, I discovered that women were largely unaware of their past. When asked to identify women in their lives who served as role models for leadership, the first identification was usually of women who served in informal leadership roles -- mothers and other female relatives, or women whose leadership was primarily understood as supporter, nurturer, and behind the scenes. After hearing stories of Disciples women in leadership, an expanded list of women who influenced their lives included women who served in formal, public, and denominational roles of leadership. The first telling of the stories was mythic. When encouraged to think more broadly about women's leadership, the telling became parabolic.

Another story of women was told on November 21, 1988, when Clara C. Babcock filled the pulpit of the First Christian Church in Reseda. The Rev. Dr. Amanda Burr, excited about the work of this project and the story of Babcock, presented a sermon as Clara herself, including information about her life and thought. The Rev. Gayle Schoepf has also told the story of women in leadership in a creative way. She has written a musical play, That

Talking Woman, to tell the story of Helen E. Moses, a prominent leader in the Christian Woman's Board of Missions.³¹

By these examples, we see ways that the story is being told in the church today. The interest is increasing to tell the story of women in the church. This project began with a concern for recovering the story of women in leadership as a resource for women and for the church. It presents both a part of the story and a challenge to the church to continue the task of finding women's story and integrating it into the larger story of the Disciples of Christ.

³¹ Gayle Schoepf, That Talking Woman: The Story of Helen E. Moses and the Christian Woman's Board of Mission (Anaheim, Ca.: Creative Church Systems, 1986).

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